



Why Gaza Remains Israel's Unfinished War

Evangeline Cheng



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SYNOPSIS

There is no political will for a peaceful deal in Gaza. All sides involved are focussed on their respective diplomatic and operational agendas rather than a durable resolution of the conflict.

COMMENTARY

As Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and United States President Donald Trump concluded their [White House talks](#) on 7 July 2025, news broke that five Israeli soldiers were killed by a roadside bomb in Beit Hanoun, in northern Gaza. It was the deadliest incident in weeks, and the latest addition to a growing toll of battlefield losses; just 10 days earlier, seven soldiers were killed in a Hamas ambush in Khan Younis. Together, the incidents expose the widening gap between battlefield attrition and diplomatic choreography. While Netanyahu presented Trump with a letter nominating him for the Nobel Peace Prize, the war in Gaza tells a far messier story.

The [60-day truce](#) being negotiated now reprises a familiar cycle: Phased release of hostages, a pause in fighting, expanded humanitarian access, and notional discussions about a post-war framework. Hamas' position has remained consistent – it demands a full Israeli withdrawal and binding guarantees that the war will not resume. But for Israel, these are non-starters. The trauma of 7 October 2023 and the spectre of Hamas' rearmament render such terms strategically unacceptable. The result is a sequencing dilemma that has plagued every prior round of talks: Israel insists on hostages first; Hamas wants guarantees front and centre. Therein lies the catch: The path to hostage recovery begins with terms Israel will not accept, while Hamas exploits the impasse to stall defeat and entrench leverage.

The July proposal differs little from prior iterations. Since October 2023, at least four

frameworks have been explored. The most substantive – [the January-March 2025 agreement](#) – lasted two months, saw the return of several hostages, and ultimately collapsed under mutual accusations. The structure repeats itself: Vague compliance mechanisms, no credible enforcement, and a breakdown over sequencing. Mediators – Qatar, Egypt, and the US – have proposed workarounds, but without teeth, the negotiations are mere theatre.

These failures also expose the limits of external mediation. Two US administrations have now thrown diplomatic weight behind ceasefire efforts without much success. Trump’s mediation is constrained by past rhetoric. During the July 7 press event, a reporter revived [Trump’s earlier proposal to relocate Palestinians to Egypt or Jordan](#) – a plan he floated a few months ago. The US President deferred to Netanyahu, who responded: “Those who want to stay can stay; those who want to leave should be able to do so.”

For Hamas, relocation proposals validate its narrative of an existential threat, amplifying fears of displacement and driving Palestinians to view the group as their primary defender. Such rhetoric inadvertently strengthens Hamas’ legitimacy and popular support within Gaza.

What followed in the White House meetings made plain that Netanyahu holds the keys to the process. Trump has endorsed Israel’s ceasefire terms, while the Israeli leader reiterated demands for Hamas’ dismantlement, leadership exile, and disarmament. Trump’s praise for his counterpart’s “resolute leadership” signals Washington’s readiness to do the bidding of the Israeli Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, the US’ regional partners are working at cross purposes. Qatar bankrolls Hamas even as it acts as a diplomatic facilitator. Turkey provides safe haven to Hamas’ political bureau and resists Western attempts at isolation. Gulf states such as the UAE have withheld reconstruction funds, including a US\$500 million pledge, made in 2024, pending Hamas’ removal and the establishment of a viable post-war administration in Gaza. With Hamas holding firm, these funds remain frozen. What has emerged is a self-reinforcing vacuum. In the absence of alternatives, Hamas continues to function by default.

Indeed, Hamas’ survival – nearly two years into a campaign aimed at its elimination – demonstrates its resilience. Despite Israel’s degradation of its command structure and the killing of over 17,000 fighters, including senior leaders such as Yahya Sinwar, Mohammed Deif, and Marwan Issa, Hamas has morphed into decentralised guerrilla cells. These units, embedded within Gaza’s tunnel networks and urban peripheries, continue to carry out lethal ambushes. Incidents like the ones at Beit Hanoun and Khan Younis highlight the group’s ongoing tactical flexibility and lethal persistence.

The appointment of Izz al-Din al-Haddad as Hamas’ new military commander in Gaza shows the group’s ability to regenerate leadership despite heavy losses. A mid-tier figure linked to the planning of the 7 October attacks, al-Haddad has vowed that there would either be an “honourable deal” or a prolonged “war of liberation”. Though Hamas’ command structure is under strain, most accounts believe it remains intact.

Resilience, in Hamas’ case, is not solely military, but also administrative. Despite the

displacement of 1.8 million people and the destruction of more than 70 per cent of Gaza's housing stock, the group continues to regulate aid, arbitrate disputes, and manage key logistics in parts of Gaza. Yet its authority no longer rests on overwhelming public approval. A June 2025 poll by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research places its governance approval at 34 per cent – a marked decline reflecting war fatigue, economic collapse, and a perceived loss of military effectiveness. Yet, even in this weakened state, Hamas retains 46 per cent support as the preferred governing authority in Gaza, virtually level with the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority (PA)'s 45 per cent.

Israel, meanwhile, faces mounting internal pressure. Opposition figures such as Yair Lapid and Yair Golan have called for a ceasefire tied to humanitarian and strategic stabilisation. A June 2025 Israel Democracy Institute poll shows 60 per cent public support for a truce conditioned on hostage release. Yet Netanyahu's coalition remains bound to far-right figures like Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir, who oppose any outcome short of Hamas' eradication. This has blocked proposals for a technocratic interim government or PA-led transition.

Tensions are also rising within Israel's war Cabinet. Israeli Defense Forces Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir and his predecessor, Herzi Halevi, have warned that operations without a political plan risk becoming Sisyphean. General Zamir's "Mini Oranim" doctrine – focused on tunnel interdictions and hostage rescues – has overtaken broader clearing campaigns. Operation Gideon's Chariots, launched in May to consolidate control over 75 per cent of Gaza, has stretched IDF planning beyond its intended scope. Leaked memos from April this year flagged mounting strain on the IDF's reservist corps, recruitment fatigue, and the erosion of hard-won tactical gains in the absence of a political endgame.

Tactical excellence has not translated into political resolution. Hamas' hybrid economy, dispersed command, and hostage diplomacy have produced a kind of intractability immune to conventional defeat. The July ceasefire proposal, like its predecessors, risks becoming just that – a proposal. Absent a credible post-war governance model, the cycle will persist. It appears the lack of a lasting peace is because both sides have a more urgent priority: Political survival. Netanyahu is often accused of continuing war to remain in power, while Hamas has no intention of giving up its grip on Gaza.

Evangeline Cheng is a research associate at the Middle East Institute, National University of Singapore. She holds a bachelor's degree in communication studies. She also has a master's degree in Asian Studies from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore.

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