Peace in Gaza requires harmonising Israel's existence with Palestinian demands

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The endgame of the Gaza Peace Plan will ultimately hinge on whether it can reconcile Israel's existential security concerns with Palestinian demands



No gainsaying – for Gaza it's a long road to peace. File image/ Reuters

After two horrific years, the guns fell silent in Gaza when the first phase of the ceasefire came into effect on October 10, 2025. President Trump's 20-point peace plan brokered under the new international peace initiative has brought temporary respite to the battered land. Amidst uncertainty, the fragile truce has seen the release of Israeli hostages (20 live and 15 deceased) by Hamas and the exchange of prisoners, as well as the partial withdrawal of Israeli forces, thus allowing the limited flow of aid to alleviate

the humanitarian crisis. The return of the remaining 13 bodies of deceased captives has become a sensitive issue, with Hamas stating that these cannot be accessed.

Since the ceasefire, Hamas has been trying to re-establish itself in Gaza, clashing with other rival groups. Barely a fortnight after the ceasefire came into effect, it is already under threat, as Israel has launched a series of strikes in response to an attack by Hamas, resulting in over 80 deaths. The current flare-up represents the most serious threat to the ceasefire. The moot questions are: Will Hamas disarm? Who will ultimately govern Gaza? Can Israel's security be guaranteed without compromising on the Palestine self-rule?

Given these ambiguities, the fragile truce risks going the same way as the previous peace initiatives, which delivered brief pauses but no permanent peace.

Today Gaza lies in ruins, with basic civic amenities destroyed and critical infrastructure flattened, as a sequel to the intense Israeli bombardment. Around 68,000 Gazans have been killed, with over twice the number wounded, in addition to some 2.2 million displaced. The economy of the enclave stands shattered; unemployment and poverty have skyrocketed.

Reconstruction of Gaza will be a herculean task; rebuilding will take years. Israel has imposed restrictions on the material entering Gaza due to its security concerns, which seriously impacts the pace of recovery. It is the fine balance between security and survival that will determine whether this truce evolves into lasting peace or ends up as a fait accompli.

The most formidable challenge is political. The proposed interim administration, backed by the regional and Western powers, is envisioned to be led by a committee composed of technocrats to lead the reconstruction process, duly supported by international monitors. The 'board of peace' to be headed by President Trump with

eminent members to include former British Prime Minister Tony Blair would act like an overarching body. It is a tough proposition for the outsiders to govern a local population which bears deep distrust and stands badly traumatised.

While planned 'de-Hamasification' of Gaza may appear to be a security imperative, it is fraught with the risk of alienating ordinary Palestinians. Durable peace requires legitimacy and not just imposing authority. Hamas's role remains a bone of contention. While Israel demands Hamas be disarmed and exit Gaza, on the other hand, Hamas seeks political recognition and security. Disarming militias and neutralising underground tunnels will require international supervision and absolute transparency.

The destiny of Gaza is intertwined with broader regional and global dynamics. Egypt, Qatar, Turkey, America and the Gulf States each have stakes in shaping the outcome. The Sharm el Sheikh summit that endorsed the ceasefire underscores the reality. The peace in Gaza is contingent upon the regional equations and big powers' interplay. However, external influence without the local consent often faces resistance.

To meet the aspirations of the Gazans, they need to be part of the process in deciding their own future and not become pawns on the international diplomacy chessboard. For the Arabs, the Gaza ceasefire is the test of political acumen; can they prioritise long-term objectives and overcome rivalries and go beyond rhetoric? For Israel, it is a test of restraint to ensure that its national security policies do not perpetuate cycles of violent retaliations.

Whether the ceasefire is merely a lull or signals the start of a renewal process, only the coming months will tell. The reconstruction cannot be cosmetic – it has to heal the social wounds as much as rebuild structures and space for the civil society. Equally vital is the aspect of meeting justice; it entails a credible mechanism to address war crimes, displacements and long-standing grievances.

The international community must move beyond emergency aid towards a structured, monitored and inclusive rebuilding programme. To this end, there is a need to empower the local leadership to make the process inclusive. Peace cannot come about through declarations but by actions on the ground.

With Israel continuing to breach the Gaza truce, there is scepticism about the ceasefire, whether it can endure and not turn out to be a fragile pause in a long-drawn tragedy. The Israeli military claimed that it fired as the militants crossed the Yellow Line, the boundary behind which the Israeli troops had pulled back and remained stationed under the ceasefire agreement.

Amid the violence, two of Trump's envoys – Steve Witkoff and the president's son-in-law Jared Kushner – travelled to Israel on October 20 to shore up the ceasefire deal. US Vice President JD Vance was in Israel two days later and sounded optimistic about the ceasefire holding on but warned Hamas of a 'fast, furious and brutal' response. Around the same time, Egypt has hosted talks in Cairo with senior Hamas official Khalil al-Hayya over the follow-up on implementing the ceasefire.

The ceasefire's next stage is expected to focus on disarming Hamas, Israeli withdrawal from additional areas it controls in the enclave and future governance of Gaza. Hamas and other allied factions reject any foreign administration of Gaza, as envisaged in Trump's peace plan. They have so far resisted calls to lay down arms, which is set to complicate the implementation of the deal. The endgame of the Gaza Peace Plan will ultimately hinge on whether it can reconcile Israel's existential security concerns with Palestinians' demand for dignity and self-determination. No gainsaying – for Gaza it's a long road to peace.

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