

# From Impasse to Progress: A Reasonable Solution That Tackles Obstacles and Opportunities to Gaza Stability

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## Key Points

- The Hamas-Israel conflict escalated towards Lebanon and in retaliatory attacks with Iran.
- Efforts to settle the conflict have frequently been hindered by a variety of deeply rooted obstacles which must be addressed before a viable solution can be reached.
- A solution should include the establishment of a reliable and effective Palestinian Authority, and be based on principles of fairness, compromise, and coexistence, with the aim of establishing mutual acceptance, shared security, and respect for each side's fundamental rights and aspirations.

## Introduction

The Hamas-Israel conflict, is deeply rooted in historical grievances, competing national aspirations, and regional power dynamics. At its core is the “Palestinian question” - the unresolved issue of Palestinian statehood, self-determination, and the rights of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation.<sup>1</sup> The conflict has not only caused immense suffering for both Israelis and Palestinians but has also had far-reaching geopolitical consequences and threatens regional stability. Attempts to resolve the Hamas-Israel conflict have often faltered due to a range of entrenched obstacles, complicating the prospects for peace. In this context, the concept of a “reasonable solution” becomes an important strategic goal and a necessary framework for any sustainable resolution.

This paper explores nine obstacles, offering a review of the interconnected issues that make achieving peace between Hamas and Israel elusive. By tackling these challenges with focused, cooperative approaches, there may yet be an opportunity to forge a path toward resolution.

## The Obstacles

### *Historical Grievances*

1. Greater Israel
2. Disputes

*Perpetual Conflict*

- 3. The Cycle of Violence

*Political Ambiguity*

- 4. End States not Realistic
- 5. Absence of a Unified Palestinian Entity

*International and Regional Dynamics*

- 6. Role of Mediators
- 7. Role of the United Nations
- 8. Non-Involvement of Regional Stakeholders
- 9. Influence of Iran

The graph illustrates the nine obstacles in a conceptual sequence, arranged to reflect the anticipated timeframe required to overcome each obstacle and progress towards a solution. The obstacles are intricately linked, often intersecting, and each plays a distinct role in impeding the path to a reasonable solution. They have been constructed based on a graphic that represents impact on a solution (low, medium, high) as the Y-axis and time (short-term, medium-term, long-term) as the X-axis. This graph provides a visual representation of the severity and urgency of each obstacle, indicating less critical issues and highlighting the most significant challenges to achieving a reasonable solution.

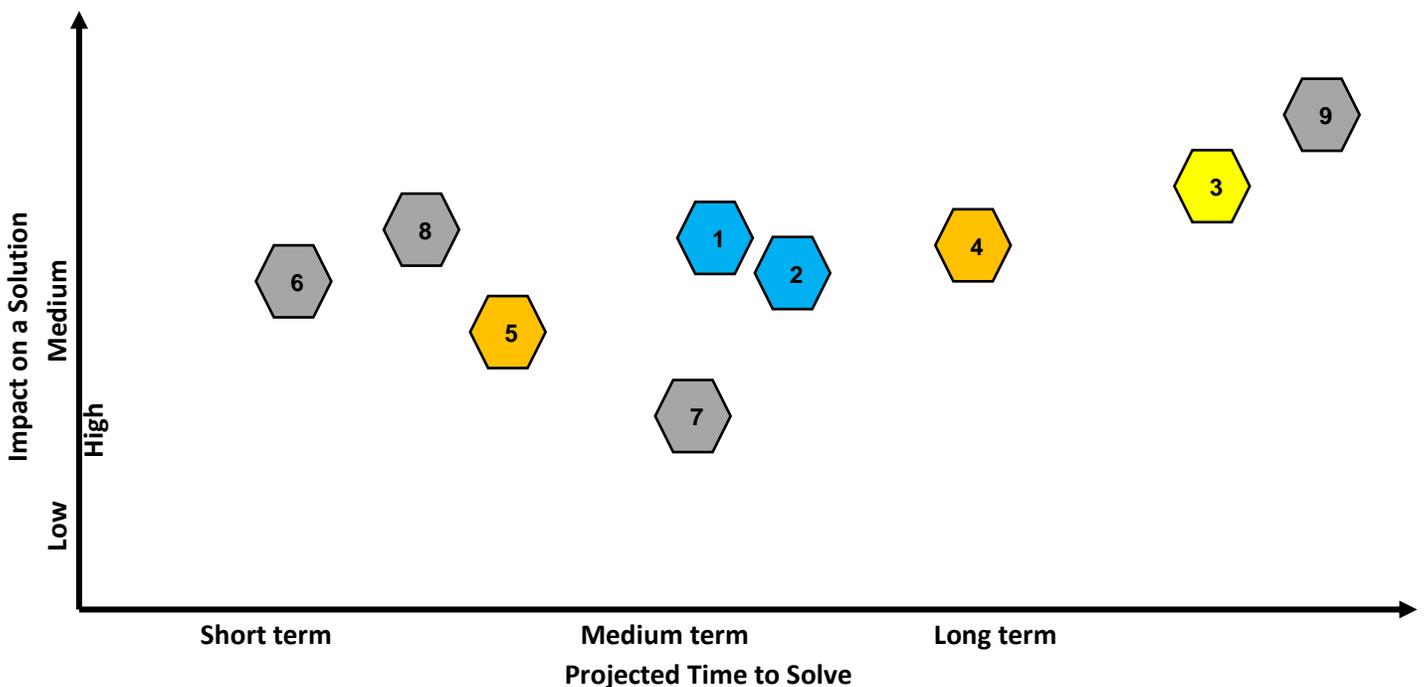


Figure 1, Obstacles visualized in time to solve and impact on a solution. Source, created by author.

***Historical Grievances (1, 2)***

- 1. Greater Israel

The concept of “Greater Israel” is a deeply rooted concern among Palestinians and other Arab communities. It refers to the belief that Israel seeks to expand its territory from the Nile River to the Euphrates River, based on a historical and religious claim that this land was promised to Jacob. This concern has spread widely among Palestinians, leading them to view Israel’s intentions as expansionist and threatening to their homeland.<sup>2</sup> This distrust is fueled by various factors, including maps depicting a large Israeli state circulating in media and symbols like the menorah on Israeli currency, which some interpret as representing expansive ambitions, and the continued expansion of settlements.

#### Impact

This belief in Israel’s expansionist ambitions has created deep mistrust among Palestinians and Arabs. As a result, many Palestinians see any ceasefire or negotiation outcome as temporary, fearing that Israel’s ultimate goal is to take over more land. This perception undermines the stability of future ceasefire agreements, as Palestinians may believe that hostilities will eventually resume due to Israel’s supposed “big dream” of expansion. The suspicion that Israel will continue to expand, regardless of Palestinian concessions, creates significant barriers to a long-term solution. Palestinians doubt Israel’s commitment to honoring United Nations resolutions or returning to pre-1967 or 1948 borders.

### 2. Disputes

The violent displacement and dispossession of Palestinians, particularly during the 1948 Palestine War and the 1967 War, have resulted in significant societal and cultural damage. This experience, known as the Nakba (meaning “catastrophe”), is viewed by Palestinians not only as a historical event but as an ongoing process that continues to affect them across generations.<sup>3</sup>

#### Impact

One of the main obstacles to achieving a stable ceasefire is Israel’s expansion of settlements since 1967. Palestinians demand justice, often framed as the “right of return” for refugees and their descendants, which is seen as essential for addressing their historical grievances. However, this demand poses a demographic threat to Israel’s Jewish identity, as the return of millions of Palestinians could result in Jews becoming a minority within Israel.

The perception of the Nakba as a continuous process shapes Palestinian threat perception and identity and influences political discourse, making the conflict more complex. This perspective reinforces a narrative of ongoing dispossession and injustice, complicating negotiations and the search for a reasonable solution.

#### Opportunity

The involvement of international bodies and mediators could help bridge the divide by addressing historical grievances and border issues. This requires either a new agreement defining these borders or enforcing compliance with existing UN resolutions. Given past violations of international laws by parties on both sides, international mediators are required to prevent it from continuing.

### ***Perpetual Conflict (3)***

### 3. The Cycle of Violence

The conflict between Hamas and Israel has led to significant suffering for both Palestinians and Israelis, continuing the cycle of violence across generations, making peace challenging to achieve. This cycle involves retaliatory attacks, giving oneself the license to counterattack, long-standing grievances, and a pervasive lack of trust between the parties. The resulting trauma fuels increased tensions, not only within the region but also in the international community. This cycle has also contributed to political instability, escalating threats against Israel from regional actors like Iran, adding to the overall complexity of the conflict.<sup>4</sup>

### Impact

The heightened threat perception makes it challenging for either side to make compromises as fear and hatred continue to grow. Previous trauma works to validate continued violence and contributes to a dangerous mentality or a sense of having “nothing more to lose.” These entrenched views create a challenging environment for establishing a ceasefire with an increased threat of going higher on the escalation ladder as no side wants to be on the losing side once the hostilities end and terms are dictated to them.<sup>5</sup>

The trauma inflicted by ongoing conflict risks re-escalation and complicates long-term resolution efforts. The situation also creates fertile ground for recruitment by groups like Hamas. At the same time, there’s a lack of trusted leadership who can negotiate on the Palestinian people’s behalf and foster unity. The deep-seated mistrust, fear, and hatred between parties complicate efforts toward a long-term resolution. The polarizing effect and misrepresentation of the conflict, with external support for each side encourages continued confrontation over compromise, making it challenging to negotiate a sustainable solution. This support reinforces hardline stances and reduces the incentive for either side to pursue peace or mutual concessions.

### Opportunity

An immediate cessation of hostilities will help bring the temperature down and move towards a plausible solution. Subsequently, a sustained ceasefire should be implemented and enforced with international mediation and guarantees against further violence. Including all relevant parties in peace negotiations, ideally under a neutral but trusted international body, would help ensure that any agreement is comprehensive and widely accepted. Reducing restrictive measures on Palestinians and improving Gaza’s humanitarian conditions through the lifting of blockades would address some root grievances, provided these changes do not compromise security. A long-term solution requires credible leaders, trusted on both sides, and a balanced plan that respects both sides’ needs and aspirations.

### ***Political Ambiguity (4, 5)***

#### 4. End States Not Realistic

The end goals of Hamas and Israel are fundamentally opposed, with each side's vision excluding the other's right to exist. This absolutist approach perpetuates a cycle of violence and prevents meaningful progress towards peace. Hamas's stated objective of destroying Israel directly conflicts with Israel's right to exist. It is crucial to distinguish between Hamas's right to exist and the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. While there is a strong case for denying Hamas's legitimacy due to its terrorist actions and refusal to recognize Israel, even with palatable Palestinian representation, little progress will be made toward self-governance without tangible support from the international community.

### Impact

Maintaining the current opposing end states and the lack of an accepted and unified Palestinian leadership hinders the prospect of a reasonable solution. To progress toward peace, both sides would need to modify their end goals to focus on security and shared benefits, emphasizing coexistence rather than mutual exclusion.

Without a clear political and military resolution, Israel's Gaza campaign adds to the cycle of violence, as temporary suppression of Hamas does not address the root causes of the conflict, including political and social grievances among Palestinians. The absence of a governance plan for Gaza could lead to power vacuums, potentially fostering factions more radical than Hamas. This ongoing instability threatens both regional stability and Israel's long-term security, as measures like blockades do little to address the fundamental political issues fueling the conflict.

### 5. Absence of a Unified Palestinian Entity

The Palestinian Authority (PA) is a governing body established in 1994 as part of the Oslo Accords, intended to administer parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, the PA's authority is fragmented and limited, as it controls a small part of the West Bank and has been effectively shut out of Gaza since 2006 due to a split between the Fatah party and Hamas.<sup>6</sup>

### Impact

The absence of a credible and widely accepted Palestinian entity for negotiations could lead to a continuation of military operations, as it limits the possibilities for meaningful dialogue and ceasefire agreements. Achieving a reasonable solution becomes highly complex without involving various Palestinian entities.

### Opportunity

For a long-term resolution, both sides must adjust their perceived end states, which are currently unrealistic and mutually exclusive. This adjustment requires moving away from the nihilistic approach of negating the other's existence and toward a framework that recognizes both Israeli and Palestinian rights to self-determination. However, progress in this direction necessitates that Israel has an acceptable Palestinian counterpart for negotiations, one that renounces violence and recognizes Israel's right to exist.

Ultimately, the international community must play a role in facilitating this shift by affirming Palestinian statehood in international law while simultaneously condemning and delegitimizing Hamas's violent tactics.

Additionally, leadership changes could introduce fresh perspectives, potentially making leaders more open to compromise and willing to overcome entrenched obstacles. To strengthen the political process, Palestinian communities abroad should be encouraged to participate in elections.

## ***International and Regional Dynamics (6, 7, 8, 9)***

### 6. Role of Mediators

International organizations play a pivotal role in mediating the Hamas-Israel conflict. Still, the effectiveness of these organizations is often limited by political constraints and the competing interests of member states.<sup>7</sup> Historically, international mediation efforts to solve the Palestinian question have struggled, often failing to address the fundamental needs of both parties. Various peace proposals have faced resistance from leaders on both sides, leading to mutual accusations of bad faith and unfulfilled commitments.

Also, in the recent Hamas-Israel conflict, the U.S. and Arab states exhibit differing levels of support for each side, contributing to a fragmented approach to peace, which undermines the effectiveness of mediation.

### Impact

Mediators' vested interests in the Middle East prevent them from presenting themselves as unbiased in the eyes of the global community. The lack of credible and unified mediation complicates building consensus on critical issues, such as ceasefire terms and the release of hostages. These issues are essential for fostering trust between the parties, yet the fragmented approach and inconsistent support for either side reduce the likelihood of achieving an effective ceasefire agreement or a sustainable resolution.

## 7. Role of the United Nations

Since its founding in 1946, the UN has provided humanitarian support and mediated conflicts. However, the complexity of modern conflicts has made it increasingly challenging for the UN to engage effectively. Additionally, perceptions of bias or distorted situational awareness have undermined the UN's credibility and influence, limiting its ability to mediate impartially.<sup>8</sup> Since the war started in Gaza, there has also been expanding tension between Israel and the UN, predominantly related to the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).<sup>9</sup>

### Impact

The UN is not viewed as a credible mediator by either party in the Israel-Hamas conflict, diminishing its capacity to facilitate a ceasefire agreement. Both sides perceive the UN as lacking the mandate, will, influence, and impartiality needed to drive a meaningful ceasefire, making it difficult for the organization to play a decisive role in stopping the violence.<sup>10</sup>

The UN's limited influence over key regional stakeholders complicates its role in achieving a long-term solution. Regional mediators may hold more sway, but there is no clear consensus on who these mediators should be. The resulting inconsistency among potential mediators could prolong the peace process, creating obstacles to a stable resolution.

## 8. Non-Involvement of Regional Stakeholders

Despite multiple countries' efforts to broker a ceasefire, a cohesive approach from regional stakeholders remains elusive. While regional actors are involved to varying degrees, their engagement is hampered by divergent interests, domestic challenges, concerns about conflict escalation, and disagreement on post-war scenarios. These factors contribute to the perception of limited active involvement in conflict resolution.<sup>11</sup> The absence of a unanimously accepted mediating body - state delegates or the UN - that both parties deem credible further impedes progress toward a ceasefire or lasting resolution.

### Impact

Achieving regional stability and preventing spillover effects require a single, legitimate authority with economic support. The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza makes a sustained ceasefire essential.

A short-term truce might facilitate the release of hostages, but full reconstruction and rehabilitation in Gaza will require a comprehensive ceasefire. Even if a new authority is established in Gaza, it will face immense financial challenges in rebuilding the region, highlighting the need for sustained regional and international support.

## 9. Influence of Iran

Iran utilizes proxy militias across the Middle East to expand its influence and achieve its strategic objectives. These proxies allow Iran plausible deniability and allow it to exert control and project power within the region, indirectly influencing local politics and security dynamics.

Despite setbacks to some of its key allies, Iran continues to leverage its network of proxy militias across the Middle East to expand its influence and achieve strategic objectives. By supporting these groups, Iran maintains plausible deniability while exerting significant control over regional dynamics, allowing it to project power and indirectly shape local politics and security landscapes.

### Impact

If Iran fails to control its proxies adequately, it could lead to increased instability and conflict in the region, as these groups rely on Iranian backing. A loss of influence over these proxies would reduce Iran's ability to shape regional politics, potentially weakening its strategic position.

When Iran successfully leverages its proxies, it enhances its influence over regional politics and security. This dynamic could shift the balance of power in Iran's favor, potentially isolating its rivals and creating a more polarized region, complicating peace and stability efforts.

### Opportunity

Of all the mediators, the U.S. is the only one who is capable of imposing sufficient cost on the two parties to get them to agree to terms. However, the U.S. has yet been unwilling to use the full extent of leverage it does hold to do so.

To strengthen mediation efforts, there is a need to find common ground amongst existing mediators such as the United States, Qatar, and Egypt. Additionally, exploring additional mediators, such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan, may be beneficial. Saudi Arabia could leverage its historical influence and strategic position in the Arab world, though skepticism among Palestinians regarding its potential bias toward Israel could be a challenge. Jordan has historical connections and experience in diplomatic efforts, but it faces internal pressures and limited relationships with some key partners.

To regain credibility, the UN should actively engage in humanitarian support and human rights advocacy, positioning itself as a trusted actor in the global community. The UN should work closely with the P5 countries (the permanent members of the UN Security Council) to build a unified understanding of the issues. Additionally, the UN Secretary-General and other high-ranking officials must engage directly with key leaders, fostering dialogue and establishing a more cohesive approach to the conflict.

A U.S. or UN-led coalition (or a regional mediator accepted by both sides) could propose conditions for a ceasefire. Türkiye, Egypt, and Qatar have expressed interest in supporting Gaza's post-war reconstruction. To prevent external influence, particularly from China, the U.S., allies, and partners, should take a proactive role.

To maintain oversight and accountability, ensuring compliance with ceasefire terms will likely require monitoring by guarantor states or other capable peace keeping group.

Regional and global partners should strengthen diplomatic initiatives to counter Iran's influence. Building alliances with countries impacted by Iranian proxies can help stabilize the region. Additionally, targeted counter-proxy operations, designed to disrupt the activities of Iranian-supported militias while minimizing collateral damage, could mitigate Iran's influence and contribute to regional stability.

### **Potential Approach to a Reasonable Solution**

A viable solution to the Palestinian question must be rooted in principles of fairness, compromise, mutual acceptance, and a shared commitment to coexistence. While challenging, this approach offers the best hope for establishing a foundation for enduring stability in the region.<sup>12</sup>

### **Diplomacy**

- An international coalition, including regional actors and global powers, should be established to provide diplomatic, financial, and humanitarian support. This coalition would oversee the implementation of agreements, ensure accountability and maintain stability during the transitional period.
- A unified Palestinian governance structure must be accepted by both the Palestinian population and Israel. This structure needs to address Palestinian legitimate aspirations, and work constructively with Israel to implement agreed-upon security arrangements.
- The international community should support the strengthening of the Palestinian Authority as the cornerstone of a future Palestinian state, recognizing that there is no credible alternative for achieving lasting peace and stability in the region.
- A balanced approach to the right of return for Palestinian refugees, potentially involving options for resettlement, compensation, or limited return, would address one of the most contentious historical

grievances. Both sides would need to reach a compromise that recognizes the needs of displaced populations while maintaining demographic stability.

- Transitional justice mechanisms, such as truth and reconciliation initiatives, could be established to address historical grievances and foster mutual understanding. This would help both sides move beyond the past and build a shared future.
- Both Israel and Palestine should recognize each other's right to exist as sovereign states with clear, mutually respected borders. This recognition would be crucial for laying the groundwork for coexistence and ensuring each side feels secure in its national identity and territory.
- A fair delineation of borders, potentially along pre-1967 lines with negotiated adjustments, would consider both historical claims and current realities, allowing both peoples to inhabit viable, self-governed territories.

### **Information**

- Educational and cultural exchange programs should be expanded to build understanding, respect, and empathy between Israelis and Palestinians, fostering a new generation committed to peace and coexistence.
- Joint efforts in schools, media, and community programs would encourage narratives of mutual respect, humanizing each side to the other and reducing the fear and mistrust that have fueled the conflict.

### **Military**

- A phased approach to security would be essential, with demilitarized zones, joint security efforts, and international peacekeeping forces where necessary to maintain stability and prevent escalation.
- A long-term monitoring and support system by international peacekeeping forces, overseen by the UN or a similar body, would be essential to sustain peace and respond to potential challenges.
- Disarmament agreements, particularly those involving non-state armed groups, would be enacted gradually, alongside guarantees of security and a focus on building trust. Support from regional and global stakeholders would help enforce and oversee these measures.

### **Economy**

- The continued prohibition of goods going into Gaza by Israel will hinder any efforts to grow Gaza's economy. Gaza's need to have the supplies required to rebuild (e.g., concrete) while balancing the security concerns of Israel. Given recent history and how some resources have been used in the past, there needs to be oversight of reconstruction projects to reassure and where necessary enforce.
- Collaborative economic initiatives, such as shared water resources, trade agreements, and development projects, would build interdependence and offer mutual benefits, fostering trust and a shared interest in peace. These efforts could be bolstered by international support and investment in both Israeli and Palestinian economic development.
- Sustainable development projects in Gaza, including post-conflict reconstruction funded by international aid, would aim to rebuild infrastructure, support local economies, and improve living standards.

### **Conclusion**

This paper described nine obstacles that are standing in the way of a reasonable solution to the Hamas-Israel conflict. Since there is no single solution to these issues, every obstacle requires maximum effort from Israel, Palestinians, and the international community to mitigate the already long-lasting negative effects of these hurdles.

Although a Gaza ceasefire agreement could bring significant relief in the short term, its success and duration will depend on the parties' ability to meet their commitments and the international community's ability to provide the necessary support in the reconstruction and pacification process. The consequences of this agreement could be profound, not only for Gaza and Israel, but also for the stability of the entire region.

The concept of a fair and acceptable solution for Israeli and Palestinian people addressing both security concerns with a focus on coexistence requires compromises of both parties. Moreover, making concrete steps toward a reasonable solution would require courageous leadership, resilience, and international backing to address historical grievances, break the cycle of a perpetual conflict, cope with political ambiguity, and manage international and regional dynamics. While challenging, a solution that addresses these principles offers the potential to break the impasse and to progress toward a peaceful coexistence and a brighter future for both Israelis and Palestinians.

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<sup>5</sup> Sanna Stark, "Ceasefire Part 1 – Understanding Threat Perception," *CSAG US CENTCOM*, August 20, 2024, [https://nesa-center.org/dev/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/2024-0820\\_Ceasefire-Part-1-%E2%80%93-Understanding-Threat-Perception.pdf](https://nesa-center.org/dev/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/2024-0820_Ceasefire-Part-1-%E2%80%93-Understanding-Threat-Perception.pdf) (accessed October 30, 2024).

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<sup>10</sup> Taylor Luck, Neri Xilber, "Gaza: Why Distrust of UN Has Deepened at a Moment of Greatest Need," *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 15, 2024, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2024/0215/Gaza-Why-distrust-of-UN-has-deepened-at-a-moment-of-greatest-need> (accessed November 4, 2024).

<sup>11</sup> Tamsin Hunt, "Friend or Foe: The (other) Stakeholders in the Israel-Hamas Conflict," *SRM-GSI*, November 16, 2023, <https://gsi.s-rminform.com/articles/friend-or-foe-the-other-stakeholders-in-the-israel-hamas-conflict> (accessed November 14, 2024).

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