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## The War in Gaza after the U.S.-Brokered Ceasefire: Assessing Trump's 20-Point Peace Plan and Its Limits

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### ABSTRACT

The Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, which escalated dramatically on October 7, 2023, saw a pivotal shift with the U.S.-brokered ceasefire in October 2025 under President Donald Trump's 20-point peace plan. This article examines the first phase's implementation, including hostage releases and aid surges, and the transition to the fragile second phase in January 2026, marked by demilitarisation efforts, a technocratic governance committee, and the Board of Peace. Despite reduced major combat, ongoing skirmishes, humanitarian challenges, and political hurdles persist, with over 72,000 Palestinian deaths reported and accusations of violations from both sides. Drawing on recent reports, it analyses changes in security, governance, and reconstruction, highlighting why complete peace remains elusive amid competing visions for Gaza's future.

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### Introduction

The war in Gaza began with Hamas's devastating attack on October 7, 2023, which killed over 1,300 Israelis and resulted in hundreds taken hostage, prompting Israel's extensive military response that caused tens of thousands of Palestinian casualties and massive infrastructure damage. By late 2025, as the humanitarian crisis deepened with widespread famine risks and collapsed services, US President Donald Trump intervened with a comprehensive 20-point ceasefire plan, which took effect in October 2025 and advanced to its second phase by January 2026. This agreement outlined hostage exchanges, increased humanitarian aid, partial Israeli withdrawals, Hamas demilitarisation, and new governance structures, yet



its rollout has been fraught with violations, including near-daily airstrikes and aid blockages. Significant changes have occurred since the deal's inception: daily aid trucks rose from virtually zero to several hundred, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) repositioned to a "yellow line" retaining control over about 53% of Gaza, and international bodies like the Board of Peace were established to oversee reconstruction. However, more than 500 deaths post-ceasefire underscore the truce's fragility, with both sides accusing the other of undermining the process. This article delves into these transformations across military, humanitarian, political, and economic dimensions, explaining the plan's mechanics, successes, setbacks, and the broader implications for lasting peace in the region. (Hansler & Shalev, 2026)

### **Historical Context of the Conflict**

The Israel-Palestine conflict traces back to the late 19th century, when waves of Jewish immigration to Ottoman Palestine increased amid rising European antisemitism, particularly accelerating after the Holocaust. In 1947, the United Nations proposed a partition plan dividing the land into Jewish and Arab states, which Jewish leaders accepted but Arab states rejected, leading to Israel's declaration of independence in 1948 and the subsequent war that displaced around 750,000 Palestinians in what they call the Nakba. Further conflicts, including the 1967 Six-Day War, resulted in Israel capturing Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and other territories, sparking ongoing debates about occupation and security needs. Hamas emerged in 1987 during the First Intifada as an Islamist group rejecting Israel's right to exist, eventually winning Gaza elections in 2006 and seizing full control in 2007, which prompted Israel's blockade alongside Egypt. This led to repeated cycles of violence: Hamas rocket attacks met with Israeli operations in 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2021, trapping Gaza's 2.3 million residents in poverty and isolation. The October 7, 2023, assault—Hamas's deadliest ever—killed 1,200 Israelis and took 250 hostages, igniting Israel's siege that displaced 90% of Gazans, destroyed 80% of infrastructure, and collapsed hospitals, creating famine conditions that necessitated urgent international mediation. Previous mediation efforts by Egypt, Qatar, and the UN had faltered, setting the stage for Trump's direct involvement, which bypassed traditional frameworks with a bold, phased approach emphasising US leadership. This historical backdrop of unresolved grievances—over land, refugees, Jerusalem, and security—continues to shape the ceasefire's challenges, as trust deficits from decades of conflict hinder compliance. (Shalev et al., 2025)

### **The U.S.-Brokered Ceasefire Plan**

President Trump's 20-point Gaza peace plan, formalised in October 2025 and backed by a UN Security Council resolution, structures de-escalation into distinct phases to balance Israeli security demands with



Palestinian humanitarian needs. Phase 1, spanning October 2025 to January 2026, mandated an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages by Hamas (both living and deceased), Israel's freeing of over 2,000 Palestinian prisoners, IDF withdrawal to the "yellow line" (maintaining 53% territorial control), and a surge in aid to 600 trucks per day through reopened Rafah and Zikim crossings. Hamas agreed to halt rocket fire, while Israel committed to no ground offensives during this period. Transitioning to Phase 2 from January 2026 onward, the plan introduces full demilitarisation of Hamas under international monitors, establishment of a technocratic governance committee for daily administration, massive reconstruction funded by the new Board of Peace (chaired by Trump with \$17 billion initially pledged), and deployment of a 20,000-strong International Stabilisation Force (ISF). Long-term elements include a "New Gaza" economic zone, reforms to the Palestinian Authority (PA), and a pathway to a two-state solution, all conditioned on sustained non-aggression. Trump described the Board—featuring figures like Jared Kushner, Tony Blair, and representatives from Netanyahu's team—as the "most consequential body" ever formed for Middle East peace, aiming to sideline UN bureaucracy. (Barron, 2025)

Critics, however, point to gaps: no explicit guarantee of Palestinian statehood, potential amnesty for Hamas fighters, and Israel's retained veto over key decisions, raising questions about equity. The plan's novelty lies in its economic incentives and multinational buy-in, contrasting prior failed initiatives like the Oslo Accords by prioritising verifiable steps over vague commitments.

### **Implementation of Phase 1: Key Milestones and Challenges**

Phase 1 commenced on October 10, 2025, following Israeli cabinet approval, marking the first major halt in fighting since October 2023. A centrepiece was the hostage-prisoner exchange: Hamas released 20 living captives and over 25 bodies by early January 2026, including the last confirmed American-Israeli dual citizen, Ran Gvili; in return, Israel freed 250 life-sentence prisoners and 1,700 others, verified by the International Red Cross amid disputes over body identifications. This built fragile goodwill but highlighted lingering tensions, as families on both sides demanded fuller accountability. On the military front, the IDF repositioned to the yellow line, freezing advances without a complete exit from Gaza, which Israel justified as necessary for border security. Humanitarian aid saw progress with Rafah reopening in limited capacity by February 2026 for medical evacuations (108 patients transferred) and the northern routes being activated, targeting 600 trucks daily—though UN reports indicate persistent shortfalls, leaving 1.9 million Gazans in acute food insecurity. Early successes included rubble clearance operations and no large-scale ground incursions. Still, violations eroded momentum: an October 19



incident where IDF forces killed two soldiers led to retaliatory strikes, and Hamas was accused of smuggling via crossings. (Jazeera, 2026)

By February 2026, Gaza's Health Ministry reported 574 post-ceasefire deaths and 1,518 injuries, attributing most to Israeli "enforcement" actions. Famine persisted, with hospitals at 6% capacity, and ethical concerns mounted over aid inspections that were slowing deliveries. While Phase 1 achieved partial stabilisation, these challenges revealed the plan's reliance on mutual enforcement, which was often undermined by immediate security concerns.

### **Transition to Phase 2: Governance and Security Shifts**

The shift to Phase 2 on January 14, 2026, introduced transformative governance: a technocratic committee led by Ali Sha'ath, comprising 15 non-partisan Palestinians, assumed daily operations like aid distribution and policing, with a planned handover to the PA by 2027. Complementing this, the Board of Peace launched on February 18, with Trump at the helm of an executive team including Kushner, Steve Witkoff, Ajay Banga, and Blair; the full 27-nation Board secured \$7 billion in pledges (US contributing \$10 billion) toward a \$70 billion reconstruction total. Kuwait and the UAE led donations at \$1.2 billion each, focusing on water, electricity, and hospitals. Security reforms advanced with ISF preparations—Indonesia as deputy commander, five nations committing 20,000 troops for a Rafah base—and demilitarisation protocols, including monitored weapon storage, buyback programs, and amnesty incentives for Hamas cooperators. Hamas indicated willingness to "store" arms for a 5-10 year truce but balked at complete surrender, while Israel insisted on total disarmament and maintained a perimeter buffer. Local policing expanded to 12,000 officers (some ex-Hamas), trained by Egypt and Jordan, signalling a gradual transfer of functions from militants. These changes reduced Israeli troop presence in most areas and introduced neutral oversight, but hurdles loom: Netanyahu's resistance to PA involvement and intact Hamas leadership complicate trust. Phase 2 thus pivots from cessation to rebuilding, testing whether economic and international pressures can override ideological divides. (BBC News, 2025)

### **Ongoing Violence and Violations**

Even with the ceasefire, 2026 has witnessed persistent "near-daily" violence, exemplified by February 27 airstrikes on police sites in Bureij and Khan Younis that killed at least seven, drawing Hamas condemnations of "extermination" tactics. Gaza Civil Defence documented 82 deaths from January 30 to February 5 alone, often tied to IDF responses to perceived yellow line breaches. Satellite imagery from The New York Times revealed 2,500 buildings demolished since the truce began, fueling claims of



punitive measures. Spillover effects hit the West Bank, with 1,860 settler incidents and 126 Palestinian deaths during operations like Iron Wall, amplifying UN concerns over ethnic cleansing via forcible transfers. Aid organisations challenged Israeli bans on 37 groups, winning a Supreme Court reprieve on February 27. Total Palestinian casualties exceed 72,000 (figures disputed by Israel, which attributes them to Hamas's use of human shields), underscoring that while major offensives paused, low-level conflict sustains trauma. These incidents strain the deal's architecture, as Israel's "enforcement" doctrine clashes with Hamas's demands for unrestricted movement, perpetuating a cycle where minor provocations escalate.

### **Humanitarian and Economic Impacts**

Pre-ceasefire, Gaza faced catastrophe: 90% displacement, 94% hospital destruction, and imminent famine affecting millions. Post-deal improvements include elevated aid flows, though still inadequate—malnutrition cases surged, and Storm Byron in early 2026 flooded 27,000 tents, killing 17. Rafah's partial reopening facilitates some relief, but Israeli inspections and Hamas diversion allegations bottleneck supplies, with the UN deeming 1.9 million in acute insecurity. Economically, the Board's pledges target a "New Gaza" revival: billions for desalination plants, power grids, and housing, potentially creating jobs in a free-trade zone. Yet a governance vacuum risks renewed radicalisation, as unemployment hovers at 50% and \$70 billion in needs dwarfs commitments. Long-term recovery hinges on sustained access and demilitarisation, transforming aid dependency into self-sufficiency. (*OCHA Gaza Humanitarian Response - Situation Report No. 66 - Question of Palestine, 2026*)

### **Political Reactions and International Involvement**

In Israel, Netanyahu celebrated Phase 1 successes but conditioned Phase 2 on verifiable Hamas disarmament, reluctantly engaging the Board. Hamas praised Trump's mediation, committing conditionally while pushing for full Rafah access and no aid reductions. The PA views 2027 control as a pathway to legitimacy. (Jazeera, 2026)

Internationally, Qatar, Egypt, and Turkey facilitated talks; Indonesia prepared ISF troops; the EU and NATO expressed reservations over the Board's inclusion of Russia. Trump's framing of it as a U.S.-led triumph contrasts with critiques of UN marginalisation and the absence of statehood pledges. Regional tensions with Iran and Hezbollah add volatility. (The Editors of ProCon, 2026)



## Future Prospects and Obstacles

Phase 2's demilitarisation and governance gains offer hope, bolstered by pledges and ISF deployment, yet no complete IDF withdrawal, persistent Hamas capabilities, and ongoing strikes signal vulnerability. Optimism stems from economic momentum; pessimism from Netanyahu's PA rejection, Hamas intransigence, and West Bank expansions. Sustainable peace requires reconciling Israel's security-first stance with Palestinian sovereignty aspirations, demanding unprecedented trust-building and reforms. As of February 2026, tangible changes exist, but tenuously—the truce endures amid shadows of resumption. (*Israeli-Palestinian Conflict | Global Conflict Tracker*, n.d.)

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