

## SPECIAL ISSUE



Israelis and Palestinians wave flags outside Damascus Gate. (Photo: Sebastian Scheiner/AP)

# **The United States And The Israeli-Palestinian Issue:**

Managing To Overcome The Discrepancy

Between Strategic Intention And Strategic Outcomes

**By the Centre for Strategic Thinking**

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## **Abstract**

Since the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis and then of the war in Gaza, the United States, as one of the most critical stakeholders in the Middle East and Europe, has a close relevance to what have been happening there, so that the U.S. itself has been significantly affected also by the two wars. This research focuses on assessing one of these two contentious issues - the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. More specially, it aims to investigate the connection of the United States to the evolving Israeli-Palestinian issue over the past decades, and meanwhile what impacts it has caused on the U.S., and then how the U.S. could continue playing a role together with other concerned parties in developing an alternative path for moving forward the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. It is assumed that a more balanced, fair, and realistic policy approach would be worth trying in the process of managing the critical concerns of various parties in order to achieve a sustainable solution leading to the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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## Introduction

In late August 2021, about seven months following the current U.S. Administration taking office, the U.S. completed the withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Afghanistan. That significant move reflected that the U.S. government had an intention to relatively downplay its anti-terror policy and meanwhile to shift the country's priority to the implementation of the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy. In line with that goal, over the past few years, the U.S. has managed to take a series of important actions on various fronts including setting up the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity together with a number of countries in the Indo-Pacific region in the economic area, and establishing the Australia-United Kingdom-United States Trilateral Security Dialogue (AUKUS) from the security dimension, as well as seeking to deepen the U.S. ties with its allies and partners in the region through other types of bilateral and multilateral arrangements.

Nonetheless, as a result of the eruption of the Ukraine crisis, and then of the Israel-Hamas war, it appears that the U.S. has been embroiled into a more complicated situation. Now, apart from minding the U.S. interest in the Indo-Pacific region, the U.S. government also has to devote a lot of efforts in managing the situation in Ukraine and in Gaza.

For the Ukraine crisis, apparently, the current scenario is not what the U.S. wanted. As a consequence of the failed Ukrainian counteroffensive against Russia, the U.S. government faces a growing pressure domestically from the American public, the political spectrum, and other various sectors.

Amid the deteriorating situation in Ukraine, the surprise attack on Israel by Hamas on 7 October 2023 added further complication to the U.S. policy agenda. At the very beginning of the Gaza crisis, a number of countries had condemned the Hamas aggression against Israeli civilians. However, with the situation getting worse on the ground in the Gaza strip, including the death of a large number of Palestinian civilians alongside the Israeli forces' military operations against Hamas, a growing number of voices at the international stage have started to shift to the Palestinian side. Some Western officials in various occasions had also spoken out their concerns about the suffering inflicted on the Palestinian civilians as a result of the measures taken by the Israeli side. Besides that, a range of large scale protests opposing Israeli actions and calling for a ceasefire in Gaza have taken place subsequently in many countries across the globe including the United Kingdom and the United States.<sup>1</sup>

The U.S. has been closely involved in mediating a deal between Israel and Hamas concerning the release of hostages.<sup>2</sup> There will still be a lot of uncertainties facing the parties concerned

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<sup>1</sup> For public responses from across certain parts of the world to the Israel-Hamas war, see Amarachi Orie, "Pro-Palestinian Protesters Calling for Ceasefire Gather Across the Globe as Bombardment of Gaza Intensifies," *CNN*, 29 October 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/29/world/global-pro-palestinian-protests-saturday-intl>.

see also Steve Bird, "Police 'Surrounded' by Protesters at Pro-Palestinian March in London," *The Telegraph*, 2 December 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/12/02/pro-palestine-march-london-met-police-protest-israel/>.

<sup>2</sup> Aamer Madhani and Zeke Miller, "US Sees Signs of Progress on Deal to Release Hostages, Bring Temporary Pause to Israel-Hamas War," *The Associated Press*, 28 January 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/biden-israel-hamas-hostage-negotiations-progress-dc453b98aea58c87a8c115237cc4e09f>.

from a long-term perspective, unless the old issues between Israel and Palestine and between Israel and the Arab countries can be properly addressed one day.

To promote the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, James K. Sebenius has advised to establish a special initiative, namely the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian Peace Initiative (AIPPI) which would involve the efforts of Israel, Palestine, regional Arab states, the U.S., and maybe other actors as well, to manage the concerns of various parties by applying a phased approach, and finally to get the Israeli-Palestinian conflict appropriately addressed.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, the implementation of such an approach, which would be mixed with military, diplomatic, and political means, as suggested by the AIPPI, would likely face daunting challenges.<sup>4</sup>

After all, since the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis and then of the war in Gaza, not only the parties directly involved in the conflicts but also other concerned parties respectively based in the Middle East region and the European continent have all been affected in various ways. The United States, as one of the most critical stakeholders in the two regions, has a close relevance to what have been happening there, so that the U.S. has been significantly affected also.

This research only tends to focus on assessing one of the two contentious issues just mentioned - the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. More specially, it aims to investigate the connection of the United States to the evolving Israeli-Palestinian issue over the past decades, and meanwhile what impacts it has caused on the U.S., and then how the U.S. could continue playing a role together with other concerned parties to jointly develop an alternative approach for promoting the Israeli-Palestinian issue toward its final settlement.

It will begin by briefly observing the situation of the Israel-Hamas war and also the origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; then it will tend to analyse the relevance of the U.S. position, policies, and measures to the evolving trend of the Israeli-Palestinian issue as well as the implications of it to the United States itself and beyond; and finally this study will attempt to see whether there could be an alternative settlement method for addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

## **1. The Gaza Crisis and the Palestinian Issue**

The new round of Israeli-Palestinian conflict driven by the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and then Israel's responsive military operation targeting the Hamas militant group in the Gaza strip has drawn a lot of international attention. Till late February 2024, more than 30000 Palestinians had died, and over 70000 had been wounded.<sup>5</sup> The aid

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<sup>3</sup> James K. Sebenius, "Overcoming Barriers to Resolving Gaza and Beyond," *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, January 2024, [https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/Paper\\_MEI-OvercomingBarriersGaza\\_v4.pdf](https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/Paper_MEI-OvercomingBarriersGaza_v4.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Rob Picheta and Abeer Salman, "More Than 30,000 Killed in Gaza Since Israel-Hamas War Began, Health Ministry Says,"

agencies still face various challenges in transferring humanitarian aid to the Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

In response to the catastrophic situation in Gaza, a great variety of actors including states leaders, other levels of government officials, representatives of both inter-governmental organization and non-government organizations/agencies, and the public from across many parts of the world had expressed their condemnation and opposition to the measures taken by the Israeli military forces through various means including large scale public protests and demonstrations. The International Court of Justice of the United Nations (ICJ) in late January 2024 ruled on a case filed by South Africa accusing Israel of committing genocide against Palestinian civilians; Israel, in line with the ICJ final ruling, was ordered to allow the access of humanitarian assistance to Gaza as well as to prevent genocide in Gaza in order to ensure the rights of Palestinian victims being protected.<sup>6</sup>

As driven by the war in Gaza, the militant groups - Hezbollah and Houthis - have so far taken a series of actions opposing Israel's military operation in Gaza. In the Northern border of Israel, the Hezbollah militant forces based in Lebanon and the Israeli Defence Forces have exchanged fire sporadically; while in the Red Sea, the Houthi militia, which demanded a ceasefire in the Gaza strip, has conducted attacks on the ships passing through the Red Sea. In late December 2023, a clash between the U.S. forces and the Houthis occurred in the U.S. response to the Houthis's disruption to a Maersk ship. Three Houthi ships were scuttled, and ten Houthi fighters died.<sup>7</sup>

The Israeli government has further tightened its measures toward Gaza and sworn to achieve the goals set by the country including dismantling the Hamas group and demilitarizing the Gaza strip etc.<sup>8</sup>

Since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, the U.S. officials have been in very close contacts with Israel. The U.S. officials opposed Israel's actions against the Palestinian civilians, and in the meantime also expressed the U.S. continuing support to Israel's measures in dealing with the Hamas militant group.<sup>9</sup>

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CNN, 29 February 2024,

<https://edition.cnn.com/2024/02/29/middleeast/gaza-death-toll-30000-israel-war-hnk-intl/index.html>.

<sup>6</sup> RT, "UN Court Orders Israel to 'Prevent Genocide'," 26 January 2024,

<https://www.rt.com/news/591325-israel-gaza-genocide-court/>.

<sup>7</sup> Jacob Gronholt-Pedersen and Ahmed Elimam, "US Sinks 3 Ships, Kills 10 After Houthi Red Sea Attack," *Reuters*, 31 December 2023,

<https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2023-12-31/maersk-pauses-red-sea-sailings-after-houthi-attack-on-container-ship>.

<sup>8</sup> For more of the claims made by the Israeli side regarding the purpose of the country's operation in Gaza, see Lauren Izso, Heather Law and Kareem El Damanhoury, "Netanyahu Says 'Nobody Will Stop Us' from Destroying Hamas as Israel Marks 100 Days of War," *CNN*, 14 January 2024,

[https://edition.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-01-14-24/h\\_626b6edb1bec35ed2b8eabb7988808f1](https://edition.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-01-14-24/h_626b6edb1bec35ed2b8eabb7988808f1); see also Time of Israel, "Destroy Hamas, Demilitarize Gaza, Deradicalize Palestinian Society: PM Outlines 'Prerequisites for Peace'," 25 December 2023,

[https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/destroy-hamas-demilitarize-gaza-deradicalize-palestinian-society-pm-outlines-prerequisites-for-peace/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/destroy-hamas-demilitarize-gaza-deradicalize-palestinian-society-pm-outlines-prerequisites-for-peace/).

<sup>9</sup> For a glance of the position of the U.S. government on Israel's war in Gaza, see Stephen Collinson, "Netanyahu's Response to Schumer Widens Rift in U.S.-Israeli Relations," *CNN*, 18 March 2024,

In response to the current round of Israel-Hamas conflict, the U.S. has for a few times blocked the United Nations' efforts for reaching a ceasefire in Gaza.<sup>10</sup> After a few rounds of intense consultations among the United Nations Security Council members, on 25 March 2024, the Security Council finally adopted a ceasefire resolution, which also urges the release of hostages held by Hamas.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, according to the media release, the U.S. has recently proposed a "prisoner-hostage" deal between Hamas and Israel. If the deal can be reached and implemented, 700 Palestinian prisoners will be released from Israel's jail, in exchange, Israel will expect to get back 40 Israeli hostages from Hamas.<sup>12</sup> Further efforts obviously will be needed in promoting the implementation of the UN resolution in the coming days.

After all, the situation in Gaza is very intense, and full of uncertainties. What is happening today in Gaza is not new. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an old issue between the Israelis and the Palestinians and between Israel and some Arab states; and it has been spanning for more than seven decades – more precisely over a century already.

It can be traced to the early 20th century, when the old colonial powers were still able to exert a great influence to many parts of the world. During the 1910s, the British Empire had replaced the status and influence of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East region. In 1917, the then British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour expressed the British government's support for establishing a Jewish state in the lands of Palestine; and the Balfour declaration also stated that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine."<sup>13</sup> By then, a majority of the population living in the Palestinian territories were Arabs, while the Jewish people were only a minority group. In the decades following, a large number of Jewish people, for escaping the anti-Semitism sentiment and persecution in Europe, had flown to the lands of Palestine. As led by a large-scale movement of Jews into Palestine, conflicts had started to take place by then between the Arabs and the Jews.<sup>14</sup>

After WWII, the British mandate to the Palestinian lands came to an end. In 1947, the United Nations General Assembly, in accordance with the resolution 181, issued a settlement plan for the Jews and the Arabs, which divided the Palestinian lands into two parts for establishing a Jewish state and a Arab state, respectively; while the holy site Jerusalem was under the

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<https://edition.cnn.com/2024/03/17/politics/netanyahu-schumer-us-israeli-relations/index.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Edith M. Lederer, "The US Vetoes An Arab-backed UN Resolution Demanding An Immediate Humanitarian Cease-fire in Gaza," *Associated Press*, 21 February 2024,

<https://apnews.com/article/un-israel-palestinians-gaza-ceasefire-resolution-vote-350c86ef261bf1a00a2515cf22764de5>.

<sup>11</sup> UN, "Gaza: Security Council Passes Resolution Demanding 'An Immediate Ceasefire' during Ramadan", 25 March 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147931>.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Roth, Ivana Kottasová, Lauren Izso, and Jeremy Diamond, "Israel Cancels Washington Visit after US Allows UN Gaza Ceasefire Resolution to Pass," *CNN*, 25 March 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/03/25/middleeast/un-security-council-gaza-israel-ceasefire-intl/index.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Sammy Westfall, Brian Murphy, Adam Taylor, Bryan Pietsch, and Andrea Salcedo, "The Israeli-Palestinian conflict: A chronology," *Washingtonpost*, 6 November 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/israel-palestine-conflict-timeline-history-explained/>.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*.

trusteeship of the UN. This arrangement was opposed by the Arabs, given that the majority of the population on the lands were Palestinians by then.<sup>15</sup>

In 1948, Israel declared independence. Then, the first Arab-Israeli war was erupted. A coalition of Arab states joined the Palestinians in fighting with the Israelis. The war was ended with the outcome that Israel's territory was further expanded based on the part designated by the UN.<sup>16</sup>

From then on, numerous rounds of conflicts between the Israelis and the Palestinians have broken out. In the earlier rounds of the conflicts, a range of Arab states had been directly representing the Palestinians in fighting and bargaining with the Israelis; since the 1980s especially following the signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (the Oslo agreements led to the establishment of the Palestine Authority and also symbolized that the Palestinians were able to partially govern their own affairs), the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has mainly happened between the Israelis and the Palestinians, with the support and partial involvement of other Arab states and pro-Palestinian groups.<sup>17</sup>

In retrospect, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has never just been an issue between the Israelis and the Palestinians, but also between Israel and the Arab world. Over the past decades, there had ever occasionally appeared a glimpse of hope for moving forward the peace process of the Palestinian issue. For instance, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, under the mediation of the United States, through signing the Camp David Accords, Israel and Egypt had ever agreed to set up a framework for addressing the Palestinian issue; then during 1993-1995, with the U.S. involvement as well, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization had signed the Oslo Accords, which were considered a big breakthrough toward addressing the relentless conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Nonetheless, the conundrums emerged from occasion to occasion driven by various internal and external factors in the process of implementing the range of consensus reached by Israel and Palestine have only added more complication to the settlement of the Palestinian issue nowadays.<sup>18</sup>

The internal factors could be related to the evolving trend of the Israeli and Palestinian societies such as the changing domestic political situation in Israel, the inadequate governance capacity of the Palestinian Authority, as well as a lack of unity of governance between the Palestinian political parties etc.<sup>19</sup> The external factors primarily have a

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> For more details of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the past decades, see Sammy Westfall, Brian Murphy, Adam Taylor, Bryan Pietsch, and Andrea Salcedo, "The Israeli-Palestinian conflict: A chronology," *Washingtonpost*, 6 November 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/israel-palestine-conflict-timeline-history-explained/>; see also Elliott Davis Jr., "Key Historical Events in the Conflict Between Israelis and Palestinians," *U.S. News*, 27 November 2023, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/slideshows/a-timeline-of-the-israel-palestinian-conflict?onepage>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> For an idea of the evolving trend of the Israeli and Palestinian domestic political situation, see James K. Sebenius, "Overcoming Barriers to Resolving Gaza and Beyond," *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, January 2024, [https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/Paper\\_MEI-OvercomingBarriersGaza\\_v4.pdf](https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/Paper_MEI-OvercomingBarriersGaza_v4.pdf).

relevance to the involvement of outside powers to the Palestinian issue.

Among all the external factors having an impact on the development of the Palestinian issue since the end of WWII, it is maintained that the role played by the United States has mattered most significantly. Israel has been a staunch ally of the U.S., and these two have kept a close communication concerning Israel's policies in dealing with the Palestinians.

## **2. The U.S. Relevance to the Palestinian Issue: Strategic Intention, Policies, Measures, and Impacts**

During WWII, the United States had acted in a manner of safeguarding the value of justice and humanity by jointing other major forces in fighting against the Nazis and protecting the interests of the Jews. Since the end of WWII, the U.S. has been a strong supporter of Israel. Throughout the same period, the U.S. intention in allying with and defending Israel has been gradually bearing more complicated geopolitical purposes.

The U.S. strategy toward the Middle East region is just part of the U.S. overall global strategy. Israel is considered playing a big part in meeting the U.S. interest in the region. To strengthen Israel's position in the Middle East, the U.S. has been stably offering financial support to Israel over the past years - From WWII till 2019, the U.S. had provided Israel with a total of \$243.9 billion in foreign aid, making Israel the largest receipt of the U.S. foreign aid. In recent decades, the U.S. foreign assistance to Israel has focused on the military aspect.<sup>20</sup> In 2021 and 2022, the U.S. offered Israel roughly the same amount of military assistance, at around \$3.3 billion respectively, taking Israel surpass any other country in receiving U.S. military aid.<sup>21</sup>

Besides that, the U.S. has been attempting to create a favourable external environment for Israel by mediating Israel's relationship with regional powers in order to promote the normalization of Israel's relationship with the Arab countries. By doing so in the meantime, the U.S. could also expect to counter the influence of relevant forces and groups in the region which are considered not favourable to the U.S. interest.

Israel's path in normalizing relations with regional countries hasn't been smoothly over the past decades, as the Palestinian issue has remained as a key obstacle between Israel and the Arab countries in jointly promoting the Middle East peace process. Since the end of WWII, under the mediation and support of the U.S., Israel has so far only managed to establish diplomatic ties with five Arab countries including Egypt, Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco.

Under the current U.S. Administration, for promoting the normalization of relationship

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<sup>20</sup> Kaia Hubbard, "3 Charts That Illustrate Where U.S. Foreign Aid Goes," *U.S. News*, 24 May 2021, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2021-05-24/afghanistan-israel-largest-recipients-of-us-foreign-aid>.

<sup>21</sup> Julia Haines, "Countries That Receive the Most Foreign Aid From the U.S.," *U.S. News*, 18 January 2024, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/countries-that-receive-the-most-foreign-aid-from-the-u-s>.

between Israel and Saudi Arabia, the U.S. government has been intended to secure a special arrangement with Saudi Arabia, part of which, according to the information shared by the media and think tanks, could be involved in offering security guarantee to Saudi Arabia by the United States. Yet, the negotiation between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia has moved very slowly, as the Saudi side attaches the U.S.-mediated Saudi-Israel normalization agreement with the management of the Palestinian issue together.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile, there is a need to be aware that the policy orientation in prioritizing the strengthening of Israel's capacity while paying less attention to the critical concerns of the Palestinians from a certain degree has driven Israel to pursue a more ambitious policy in the Palestinian territory, which in turn, has led to a stronger resistance of the Palestinians against Israel domination. It somehow has also compromised the U.S. mediating efforts in addressing the Palestinian issue. The scenario on the Palestinian territory throughout the past years has actually confronted the interests of all concerned parties after all.

### **Israel and Palestine Are Locked in A Scenario of Relentless Conflict**

For Israel, security has constantly been a critical concern. To address the country's security challenge, the Israeli government has kept tightening control to the Palestinians. Since Hamas took control of the Gaza strip in 2007, Israel has imposed a full blockade on this small enclave, making Israel have a strict control of the movement of goods and people in and out of Gaza.<sup>23</sup> A report released by the Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor showed that the blockade over the past years has further damaged Gaza's economy and deepened the humanitarian crisis and destitute situation in this territory.<sup>24</sup> In the West Bank, the restrictive measures imposed by Israel also have seriously affected the Palestinians' rights in carrying out normal economic and development activities. According to a report submitted by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development to the UN General Assembly in November 2022, due to the additional control measures imposed by the Israeli authority on the Palestinians in part of the Area C of the West Bank, between 2000 and 2020, the Palestinians in the West Bank had suffered an accumulated economic loss of \$50 billion.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, the resistance of the Palestinians against Israeli control has been exhibited in various means including occasionally launching attacks against the Israelis.

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<sup>22</sup> For more information on the negotiations of the U.S.-mediated Saudi-Israel deal, see Michael Kimino and Daniel Depetris, "Israel-Saudi Normalization Agreement: What Is in It for the U.S.?" *Defence Priorities*; see also Lucy Kurtzer-Ellenbogen, Hesham Youssef, Robert Barron, and Adam Gallagher, "Is A Saudi-Israel Normalization Agreement on the Horizon?" *United States Institute of Peace*, 28 September 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/09/saudi-israel-normalization-agreement-horizon>.

<sup>23</sup> Sammy Westfall, Brian Murphy, Adam Taylor, Bryan Pietsch, and Andrea Salcedo, "The Israeli-Palestinian conflict: A chronology," *Washingtonpost*, 6 November 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/israel-palestine-conflict-timeline-history-explained/>.

<sup>24</sup> Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, "A Generation under Blockade: Consequences of Israel's 17-year-Blockade of the Gaza Strip," 25 January 2023, <https://euromedmonitor.org/uploads/reports/En-Gaza-17-years-report.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, "Economic Restrictions in the West Bank Exact \$50 billion Toll between 2000 and 2020," 22 November 2022, <https://unctad.org/news/economic-restrictions-west-bank-exact-50-billion-toll-between-2000-and-2020>.

In response to the present round of Israel-Hamas conflict, the Israeli side claimed to completely dismantle Hamas. It is not certain at the moment how likely Israel would tend to achieve this objective, given that the members of Hamas or the supporters of Hamas cannot be fully destroyed. Let's not forget that Hamas back in 2006 won a legislative election. Apparently, Hamas has a huge number of supporters in Gaza and the West bank.

Observers from various circles widely believed that the Palestinians should be given a hope of being able to pursue development and achieve self-determination. Otherwise, the hopeless Palestinians would more likely be ready to take radicalized measures against Israeli domination.

Overall, the measures and resistant measures repeatedly taken by the Israelis and the Palestinians appeared to have pulled the two sides into an endless circle.

### **United States: Managing to Overcome the Discrepancy between Strategic Intention and Strategic Outcomes**

As for the United States, over the past years, it has devoted enormous economic, political, and diplomatic commitments in supporting the implementation of Israel's policy agenda including Israel's handling of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The U.S. has acted as a significant mediator in helping address the Palestinian issue. No doubt the U.S. involvement in this matter has also generated some implications to the U.S. itself.

From the international responses to the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict, it appeared that the U.S. handling of the matter has generally stood at a different perspective from the broad international community. The U.S. has subsequently voted against a series of UN resolutions demanding a humanitarian ceasefire in the Gaza strip. Here are two rounds of calls made by the UN General Assembly, to which the U.S. had voted "no" - in late October 2023, about three weeks following the Hamas attack on Israel, the General Assembly passed a resolution calling for a humanitarian truce in Gaza, which showed that 121 members voted in favour, 14 against, and 44 abstentions; while in mid-December 2023, in another round of call by the General Assembly for reaching a humanitarian ceasefire, the voting results showed 153 in favour, 10 against, and 23 abstentions.<sup>26</sup>

With regard to the Arab countries' responses to the ongoing war in Gaza, their positions are very much similar to that of the large international community, urging for a ceasefire of the hostilities. On the settlement of the long-term Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Arab states including those having normalized diplomatic relations with Israel have generally been standing closely with the propositions of the Palestinians.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> UN, "Gaza crisis: General Assembly Adopts Resolution Calling for 'Humanitarian Truce', Civilian Protection,"

27 October 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1142932>; and UN, "UN General Assembly Votes by Large Majority for Immediate Humanitarian Ceasefire during Emergency Session," 12 December 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1144717>.

<sup>27</sup> For a glance of the positions held by a range of Arab nations on the Palestinian issue, see UN, "Veto of Security Council

As for attitudes of the U.S. allies, especially its key European allies, toward the Gaza war, they had condemned the Hamas attack on Israel; and some European officials, for showing their supports to Israel, at the very early stage of the conflict had also subsequently paid visits to Israel.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, in response to the handling of the deteriorating situation in Gaza by Israel, and also of the Palestinian issue more broadly over the past years, the U.S. and its key allies have not always stood on the same page. For the current conflict, at a later stage, some European officials had expressed their concerns to the hostilities carried out by the Israeli forces toward the Palestinian civilians. Additionally, the differences between the U.S. and its key allies can be reflected by their voting positions in the United Nations Security Council.<sup>29</sup>

Besides the above, it is also in need to mention that even though the U.S. has devoted a great deal of economic, political, and diplomatic efforts in supporting Israel's position on the Palestinian issue, and been in close communication with Israel over the past years regarding Israel's policies on other important issues as well, the development of the domestic political situation of Israel hasn't appeared to meet the U.S. interest well. For instance, the U.S. cannot prevent the rise of some influential figures in the Israeli political arena, who would very much encourage further expansion of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank, which apparently will make the Palestinian issue more difficult to handle.<sup>30</sup>

Overall, from the positions held by the Arab world, the U.S. allies, and the broad international community to a larger extent on the handling of the Palestinian issue, we have seen that, for numerous occasions, the U.S. and a wide range of actors have stood at different grounds. Also, Israel's intent in dealing with the Palestinian issue hasn't appeared to be under the proper control of the U.S.. Therefore, generally, today's scenario from the U.S. perspective doesn't seem to have served the U.S. strategic intention well in the Middle East region.

Under the above circumstances, a number of questions concerning the U.S. strategy toward the Middle East as well as other regions would be raised and worth considering. For example, what would be the U.S. core strategic interests in the Middle East and how would the U.S.

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Resolution Calling for Ceasefire in Gaza Emboldens Israel to Continue Crimes against Palestinian People, Speakers Tell General Assembly," 5 March 2024, <https://press.un.org/en/2024/ga12586.doc.htm-0>.

<sup>28</sup> For a list of Western officials who had visited Israel at the very early stage of the Israeli-Hamas conflict, see Jonathan Lis, "Visiting Israel, Leaders of Czech Republic, Austria Pledge Solidarity Against Hamas," *Haaretz*, 25 October 2023, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-10-25/ty-article/.premium/visiting-israel-leaders-of-czech-republic-austria-pledge-solidarity-against-hamas/0000018b-6763-d979-a3bb-ef77992a0000>.

<sup>29</sup> For the different voting positions held by the U.S. and its key European allies in the Security Council, see Edith M. Lederer, "The US Vetoes An Arab-backed UN Resolution Demanding An Immediate Humanitarian Cease-fire in Gaza," *Associated Press*, 21 February 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/un-israel-palestinians-gaza-ceasefire-resolution-vote-350c86ef261bf1a00a2515cf22764de5>.

<sup>30</sup> For a brief idea of Israel's domestic political situation, see Natan Sachs, "Peace between Israelis and Palestinians Remains Possible, but to Get There, Both Sides—and America—Need to Be Realistic About What's Achievable Now," *Foreign Affairs*, 19 January 2024,

[https://www.foreignaffairs.com/israel/peace-between-israelis-and-palestinians-remains-possible?utm\\_campaign=Brookings%20Brief&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=291188820&utm\\_source=hs\\_email](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/israel/peace-between-israelis-and-palestinians-remains-possible?utm_campaign=Brookings%20Brief&utm_medium=email&utm_content=291188820&utm_source=hs_email);

see also James K. Sebenius, "Overcoming Barriers to Resolving Gaza and Beyond," *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, January 2024,

[https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/Paper\\_MEI-OvercomingBarriersGaza\\_v4.pdf](https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/Paper_MEI-OvercomingBarriersGaza_v4.pdf).

value them in the years ahead? Under the big context of a growing multipolar world from various dimensions, what would the strategic alliances mean for the U.S.? and how likely would the U.S. be motivated to adjust its traditional foreign policy approach by taking into account the changes at both regional and international levels?

Given that the deployment of the strategic alliances has been a very long tradition in the U.S. foreign policy. Giving it up would be impossible. Nevertheless, it doesn't mean that the U.S. must have to apply its strategic alliances and deal with its allies in the same traditional manner. The development of the U.S. domestic politics would likely have an impact on how the U.S. strategic alliances can be applied. Apart from that, the adjustment of the U.S. strategic approach, whether in a traditional manner or not, would be subject to the changes of the regional and global contexts. Further, applying the U.S. strategic alliances in a non-traditional manner could also mean that there might be a possibility for the U.S. to seek a more balanced strategic approach in dealing with its allies, partners, and also opponents.

More precisely, for instance, with regard to the U.S. strategy toward the Middle East, traditionally, the implementation of the U.S. foreign policy in this region very much weighs on strengthening Israel's capacity and position and in the meantime aligning with Israel and other possible partners to keep weakening the relevant powers and militant groups which are considered hostile to the United States. Nevertheless, this approach so far hasn't been proved to be able to work out for the best interests of the U.S., Israel, regional powers, and a wide range of others in the Middle East region. For instance, in relation to the management of the Palestinian issue under the U.S. mediation, to this stage, it hasn't made Israel more secure, so haven't other actors too in the region. The application of such approach also hasn't proved its value in contributing to the Middle East peace process. Israel's relationship with the regional powers more generally, as far as concerning the Palestinian issue over the past decades, has been no fundamental change.

Hence, a more balanced approach is assumed to be able to better meet the interests of all the concerned parties. It basically means that, instead of playing the traditional game of strengthening one against another, the critical concerns of all the parties involved in a particular subject matter should be well taken into consideration and balanced at the same time. Given that the U.S. has long been involved in mediating the Palestinian issue, as long as by adopting a more balanced strategy, the U.S. will still have an advantage in handling this matter; and it will be supposed to serve as a more responsible actor together with other parties to promote the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### **3. An Alternative Way toward Settling the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

To address the Palestinian issue, there is a need to firstly see what is the most serious obstacle lying in front of the parties at the moment, as well as the critical actions taken by the relevant parties that have been leading this matter to today's stage. Obviously, all concerned parties should take certain responsibilities from various degrees for the evolving

trend of the Palestinian issue over the past decades.

Back in 1947, the Palestinians missed their first opportunity in achieving a statehood and self-governance by rejecting a two-state solution sponsored by the UN General Assembly. Even though the then UN arrangement wasn't satisfactory from the perspective of the Palestinians and some Arab countries. Nevertheless, the UN resolution apparently reflected a careful consideration of the interests of all concerned parties. After having gone through all the grievances over the past more than seven decades, for the Palestinians, the initial UN solution still appears to be the most reasonable and fair one in contrast to all other arrangements negotiated by the concerned parties in the later steps so far.

Anyway, from then on, the interactive actions taken by the concerned parties have added more complication to the handling of the Palestinian issue.<sup>31</sup> In the aftermath of the Six-Day War between Israel and the Arab countries in 1967, the Israelis had started to build settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. That move taken by Israel was later proved that it had significantly changed Israel's position in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as in the negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Over the past years, the building of the Israeli settlements has remained as one of the most serious obstacles in moving forward the peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

The long-term absence of a government-like authority in the Palestinian territories had also played a role in undermining the Palestinians' position and capacity in negotiating with the Israelis. In the earlier rounds of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict roughly from the late 1940s to the early 1980s, a range of Arab countries had mainly represented the Palestinians in fighting with the Israelis. Yet, representation by other countries was certainly not enough for the Palestinians in order to achieve their own statehood.

After the Cold War, between 1993 and 1995, the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Israeli authority, as mediated by the United States, signed the Oslo Accords, which served as an interim solution for addressing the Palestinian issue.<sup>32</sup> Reaching the Oslo Accords, instead of contributing to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, apparently had made the issue more complicated to manage in the next steps after then.

In line with the Oslo Accords, the West Bank was divided into three areas - Areas A, B, and C, which respectively account for 18%, 22%, and 60% of the territories in the West Bank. Most of the Palestinians settle in Areas A and B. These two areas are not contiguous, and they are separated by Area C into a number of small isolated segments.<sup>33</sup>

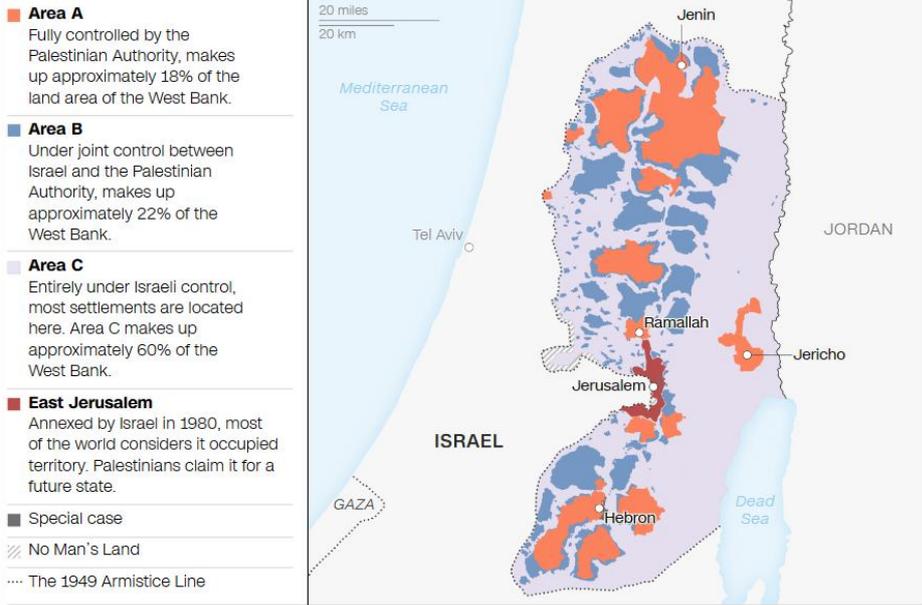
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<sup>31</sup> For a timeline of the series of actions taken by the concerned parties, see Sammy Westfall, Brian Murphy, Adam Taylor, Bryan Pietsch, and Andrea Salcedo, "The Israeli-Palestinian conflict: A chronology," *Washingtonpost*, 6 November 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/israel-palestine-conflict-timeline-history-explained/>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Anera, "What Are Area A, Area B, and Area C in the West Bank?," <https://www.anera.org/what-are-area-a-area-b-and-area-c-in-the-west-bank/>; see also Abbas Al Lawati, "Who Are Israeli Settlers and Why Are They So Controversial?" *CNN*, 2 February 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/02/02/middleeast/who-are-israeli-settlers-palestinian-land-intl/index.html>.

### Areas A, B, and C of the West Bank



Sources: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Occupied Palestinian Territory, U.S. Department of State; Graphic: Kara Fox and Henrik Pettersson, *CNN*, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/02/02/middleeast/who-are-israeli-settlers-palestinian-land-intl/index.html>.

The civil as well as the internal security affairs of Area A are administered by the Palestinian Authority; in Area B, the civil affairs are managed by the Palestinian Authority, while the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority jointly deal with the internal security of Area B; Area C is contiguous and fully controlled by the Israeli authority.<sup>34</sup>

Besides that, the additional restrictive measures imposed by the Israeli authority in the these areas including setting up extra checkpoints, separation walls, and barriers have created more difficulties for the Palestinians to reach each other.<sup>35</sup>

Apparently, these complex arrangements - the division of the West Bank into three areas, the non-contiguity of Areas A and B, and the imposition of additional restrictive measures in these territories etc. - have further isolated the Palestinians and made the achievement and implementation of a two-state solution become more difficult and unrealistic. Meanwhile, they have also created more chances for the relentless conflicts between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

As far as there is no boundary between Israel and Palestine - just like the one between two normal sovereign states in international relations - there will be a likelihood for the Israelis to

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>35</sup> Ahmad Ibsais, "30 Years Later, It's Time to Bury the Oslo Accords," *The Nation*, 4 October 2023, <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/oslo-accords-thirty-years-end/>.

incrementally keep building the Israeli settlements. In order to protect the Israelis and the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, the Israeli government over the past years has kept tightening control to the Palestinians. Meanwhile, the measures taken by the Israeli authority have received a growing resistance of the Palestinians.

After all these years of accumulation of the problems between the Israelis and the Palestinians, the two sides have been locked in a very difficult situation.

To address the Palestinian issue, some raised the question that whether the one-state solution could work out for the Palestinians and the Israelis. Obviously, neither side would agree to be governed by the other side. So, a two-state solution would still sound more reasonable for the two sides and also for the region from a long-term perspective. A two-state solution is also generally supported by the broad international community.

A Palestinian statehood primarily means that the Palestinians need to have their own contiguous and independent territory and be able to take control of their own internal and external affairs, as well as that Israel and Palestine have to set their borders recognized in international relations; even though the Israelis and the Palestinians may need to agree on certain special arrangements concerning these areas of issues.

Achieving a Palestinian statehood will take a number of steps and numerous arrangements in every step. It would be unrealistic to assume that the Israeli government could be pushed to move all the Israeli settlements out of the West Bank in the near future. Regarding what agreements between the Israelis and the Palestinians on the removal of the Israeli settlements can be reached and how long it will take for implementing the relevant agreements, there will be a long way to go and also be a lot of uncertainties. Nevertheless, no matter how the relevant agreements in the long-term future could be like, at least in the near term, the concerned parties will be in need of jointly working out an interim agreement, in line with which, to figure out how to turn the divided areas in the West Bank into contiguous regions by making certain adjustments to them.

These will be involved in the mobilization of a large portion of people and settlements. The Israelis and Palestinians will have to switch their living areas in order to bring the Israelis as well as the Palestinians together, respectively.

Ending the isolated status of the Palestinians by bringing them together in a contiguous territory would be a precondition for and also the most critical step toward establishing their own statehood.

If the Palestinians and the Israelis would manage to accomplish the above step. A lot of issues that have affected the promotion of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process such as the Palestinian refugee issue would be relatively easier to address. In the previous discussions between the Israelis and the Palestinians, the two sides disagreed on the issue of whether the Palestinian refugees, who fled their homes during the 1948-1949 war, should have a right

to return. The Palestinians insisted that they should have such entitlement; while the Israeli side refuted that the return of a large portion of Palestinian refugees would demographically lead Israel to end as a Jewish state.<sup>36</sup>

To address this matter, as far as the Palestinians would manage to establish their own statehood, even if the Palestinian refugees may not be able to go back to their former homes, at least a future Palestinian statehood with a contiguous territory could create a chance for them to return to the Palestinian communities and to build new homes.

Ending the separated status of the Palestinians also means that the condition for setting up a Palestinian state, for a very significant part, would have been met already. Besides that, the Israelis and the Palestinians may need to consult on other series of important issues as well such as the status of Jerusalem and the borders etc.

The general idea, after all, is that as far as the most critical conditions for a statehood are met, there will be a need for the Palestinians to take into account establishing the Palestinian statehood in the first place before waiting for all the issues with Israel being settled. Should the Palestinian statehood be founded, Israel and the future Palestinian state can jointly set up a special mechanism to peacefully negotiate or manage the unsettled issues.

It would be very helpful toward the settlement of the Palestinian issue if other concerned parties including the Arab states, the United Nations, the United States, and others would continue playing their parts constructively in encouraging the Israelis and the Palestinians to reach an agreement on the above mentioned arrangements. These would serve the best interests of all concerned parties.

For Israel, since its founding, security has always been a primary concern. Over the past decades of handling of the Palestinian issue, the Israeli authority should have realized that the best choice for achieving a more secure environment for the Israelis would be to free the Palestinians, rather than lock them. Apart from that, the appropriate management of the Palestinian issue in the next steps would pave the way for Israel's interest in normalizing the country's relationship with the Arab states. The broad Middle East region would benefit from the peaceful management of the Palestinian issue then.

For the Palestinians, the struggle made in defending their rights and interests has gone through a very long period already. The settlement of their conflicting interests with the Israelis will still have to undergo a long process. In the years ahead, to achieve the status of full self-governance, very crucially, the Palestinians from various sectors will need to stay more united. Regardless of which Palestinian political party will be in power in the future (a coalition of political parties in a governing position could also be taken into account), improving governance capacity, fighting corruption, and improving people's well-being should always be prioritized.

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<sup>36</sup> The BBC, "Trump Releases Long-awaited Middle-East Peace Plan," 28 January 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51288218>.

Besides that, by learning from the past, the Palestinians need to see that, instead of resorting to violence, it is important for them to adapt to better means in defending their rights and interests and in managing their relationship with the Israelis. Unlike the traditional colonial powers, which, following their colonization of many parts of the world for a few centuries, had finally left, Israel has nowhere else to go. The future Palestinian state and the Jewish state will always be neighbours to each other. The endless Palestinian-Israeli conflict can only harm the two societies. Therefore, it would be better for the two sides to jointly work out a series of measures in peacefully managing each other in the future.

For the United States, since the end of WWII, the U.S. has been closely involved in mediating the Israeli-Palestinian issue, even though the evolving situation hasn't quite been under the U.S. control. The policies and measures taken by the U.S. from a certain degree has also contributed to the complication of the Palestinian issue. The signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Authority had initially been taken as a big breakthrough toward the final settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, the complex arrangements of relevant terms under the Oslo Accords in addition to other series of emerging incidents had made the implementation of the Oslo Accords impossible.

When the U.S. and Israel in 2020 proposed a new settlement plan to the Palestinians. It was generally viewed that it had gone too far in favouring Israel - for instance, the plan had set too many unfair preconditions for the Palestinians to meet in order to lead the Palestinians to achieve their own statehood.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, it was not surprising that the Palestinians and the Arab countries refuted and rejected the U.S. settlement plan.

While seeing the unfairness of the 2020 U.S. peace plan to the Palestinians, certain ideas/measures proposed by the plan - such as swapping territories between the Israeli and Palestinian communities in order to make the divided areas contiguous, as well as physically linking the Gaza strip and the West Bank by building a highway or a rail line - could be taken into account in future negotiations by the concerned parties.<sup>38</sup> These appeared to be more practical measures in leading to a Palestinian statehood.

Regarding how the Israeli and Palestinian territories can be switched and which part of the Israeli settlements should be removed accordingly from time to time, these detailed arrangements as well as other variety of issues concerning the Palestinians and the Israelis will need further improvements in future negotiations in order to guarantee fairness for the Palestinians. The principle of fairness should be applied alongside the whole process, by counting the critical concerns of both the Israelis and the Palestinians, under the support of other concerned parties committed to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

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<sup>37</sup> For some of the views and responses on the U.S. 2020 settlement plan, see The BBC, "Trump Releases Long-awaited Middle-East Peace Plan," 28 January 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51288218>; see also Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/Trump\\_peace\\_plan#Other\\_reactions](https://en.wikipedia.org/Trump_peace_plan#Other_reactions).

<sup>38</sup> For a brief understanding of the U.S. 2020 peace plan on the Palestinian issue, see Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/Trump\\_peace\\_plan#Other\\_reactions](https://en.wikipedia.org/Trump_peace_plan#Other_reactions).

The U.S. would benefit from being a just and fair mediator on the Palestinian issue. It could help heal its damaged credibility in the Middle East and among the Arab nations over the past years of the U.S. deep involvement in the Middle East affairs.

## Conclusion

On 25 March 2024, under the concerted efforts of various parties, the Security Council passed a long-awaited resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza during Ramadan, an immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, and the expanded humanitarian aid to flow into Gaza.<sup>39</sup> UN Secretary-General António Guterres responded through the social media X that “This resolution must be implemented. Failure would be unforgivable”.<sup>40</sup> Even though the parties didn’t agree on everything, the adoption of the resolution apparently reflected a joint achievement of various parties, a positive outcome, and was widely welcomed by the international community.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, continuing consultations will be needed by the parties in promoting the implementation of the resolution, given that Israeli officials have expressed dissatisfaction with the passing of the resolution. In response to the U.S. abstaining vote, which allowed the resolution to pass, two Israeli senior advisors to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who were supposed to discuss with the U.S. side on the ground situation and Israel’s further actions in Gaza, canceled their previously scheduled trip to the U.S..<sup>42</sup> The Hamas group also has certain concerns at the moment on the negotiation progress with Israel as well as the commitment made by the Israeli side.<sup>43</sup>

In the coming steps, managing to achieve a comprehensive agreement among the concerned parties in the long-term future, as well as carrying out the relevant arrangements reached step by step will be daunting tasks.

While having suffered numerous failures in handling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the past decades and also having realized the huge challenges ahead, there will also be a need to see the new opportunities in the future for the concerned parties to explore in moving forward the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Apparently, a more balanced, fair and realistic policy approach will be worth trying in the process of dealing with the critical concerns of various parties. Meanwhile, in order to make big breakthroughs step by step toward the final settlement of the Palestinian issue, in addition to highlighting the significance of a range of

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<sup>39</sup> UN, “Gaza: Security Council Passes Resolution Demanding ‘An Immediate Ceasefire’ during Ramadan”, 25 March 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147931>.

<sup>40</sup> Cited from Richard Roth, Ivana Kottasová, Lauren Izso, and Jeremy Diamond, “Israel Cancels Washington Visit after US Allows UN Gaza Ceasefire Resolution to Pass,” *CNN*, 25 March 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/03/25/middleeast/un-security-council-gaza-israel-ceasefire-intl/index.html>.

<sup>41</sup> For the views expressed by a wide range of parties concerning the newly passed UNSC resolution, see UN, “Gaza: Security Council Passes Resolution Demanding ‘An Immediate Ceasefire’ during Ramadan”, 25 March 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147931>.

<sup>42</sup> Richard Roth, Ivana Kottasová, Lauren Izso, and Jeremy Diamond, “Israel Cancels Washington Visit after US Allows UN Gaza Ceasefire Resolution to Pass,” *CNN*, 25 March 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/03/25/middleeast/un-security-council-gaza-israel-ceasefire-intl/index.html>.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

core guiding principles and statements, very crucially, the concerned parties will also need to jointly create a more realistic path, in line with which, to develop a series of concrete and practical measures accordingly in every step, and also be ready to closely consult and adjust the relevant measures from occasion to occasion in the implementation process in order to avoid what have been achieved being reversed.

It is widely agreed by the international community that a two-state solution should be the way out for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By adhering to this broad consensus, it would be much helpful toward ultimately solving the conflicting interests of the Israelis and the Palestinians, if the two main parties would be more realistic about their demands in different stages. The most crucial step, as already emphasised in the main part of this paper, should be to make efforts by the concerned parties to end the isolated status of the Palestinians by creating a contiguous region for them in the West Bank, and then assist them to establish the Palestinian statehood in the first place before waiting for all the conflicting issues between the Israelis and the Palestinians being solved.

As long as the Palestinians live in a condition of being widely segregated, recognition of the Palestinian statehood in diplomatic terms - in the case of Palestine - would not carry much material meaning for the Palestinians (diplomatically, Palestine has already been recognized as a state by 138 countries across the globe by the way), as it will not be able to fundamentally change the fate and conditions of the Palestinians. Without a material sovereign statehood, the Palestinians and the Israelis will have to face the same challenges as they have experienced over the past decades, respectively.

Therefore, in the years ahead, addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be a big test to the Israelis, to the Palestinians, and to other concerned parties, as well as to the human capacity to a broader extent. To a certain degree, it is about whether humans would be able to increase their capacity in jointly solving very complex issues.

**Photos - A Scene of Catastrophes Led by the War in Gaza**



#1: Feb. 22, 2024 | Palestinians wait for treatment at a hospital following an Israeli airstrike on a residential building in Deir al-Balah, Gaza. (MAJDI FATHI/NURPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES)



#2: Dec. 25, 2023 | A man carries the body of a child following Israeli airstrikes at Maghazi refugee camp in Gaza. (ALI JADALLAH/ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES)



#3: Jan. 7, 2024 | Veteran Al Jazeera journalist Wael Dahdouh holds the hand of his son Hamza, who also worked for Al Jazeera, after he was killed in an Israeli airstrike in Rafah, Gaza. Dahdouh lost his wife, two other children and a grandson during an Israeli airstrike in October. At least 79 journalists and media workers have been killed in the conflict, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. (HATEM ALI/AP)



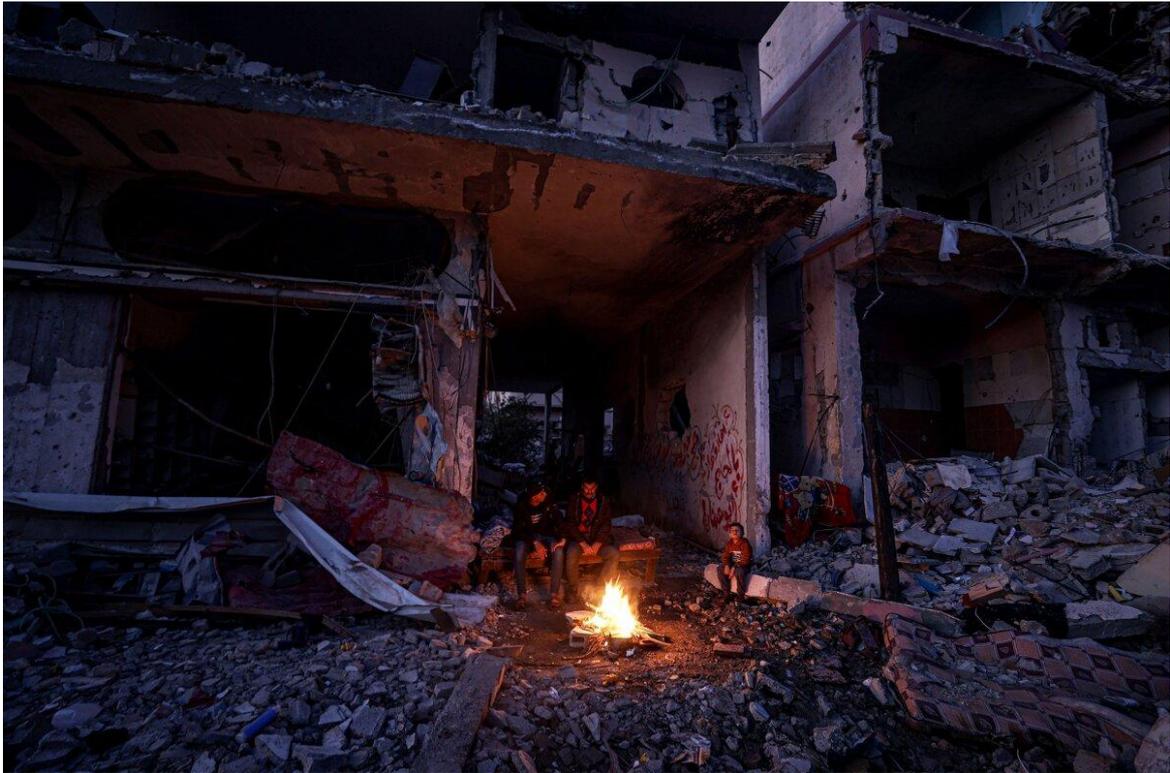
#4: Dec. 3, 2023 | Young children injured in Israeli airstrikes arrive at Nasser Medical Hospital in Khan Yunis, Gaza. (AHMAD HASABALLAH/GETTY IMAGES)



#5: Dec. 8, 2023 | Palestinians wounded during Israeli bombardment arrive at a hospital in Khan Younis, Gaza. (MOHAMMED DAHMAN/AP)



No.6: Dec. 8, 2023 | Israeli soldiers guard a truck packed with bound and blindfolded Palestinians stripped of their clothing, in Gaza. Israeli forces have been rounding up Palestinians in northern Gaza for interrogation as they search for Hamas fighters. (MOTI MILROD/HAARETZ/AP)



No.7: Nov. 30, 2023 | Palestinians struggle to stay warm during a temporary truce between Israel and Hamas, in the Huzaa district of Khan Yunis, Gaza. (MUSTAFA HASSONA/ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES)



No.8: Nov. 13, 2023 | A young relative of the Kadih family, members of whom were killed in Israeli attacks, mourns during funeral prayers in Khan Yunis, Gaza. (MUSTAFA HASSONA/ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES)



No.9: Dec. 21, 2023 | Palestinians line up for a free meal in Rafah, Gaza. Nearly the entire Gaza population is at risk for famine, according to the U.N. (FATIMA SHBAIR/AP)



No.10: Nov. 1, 2023 | A man reacts as Palestinians conduct a search and rescue operation following Israeli strikes on Jabalia refugee camp in Gaza City. (ALI JADALLAH/ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES)



No.11: March 12, 2024 | A Palestinian girl reads the Koran, Islam's holy book, on the second day of Ramadan in Rafah, Gaza. (MOHAMMED ABED/AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

**Notes:**

- Cover photo is cited from USATODAY, at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2016/02/18/time-rethink-israeli-palestinian-conflict/80499106/>.
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