

**Forum:** United Nations Security Council

**Issue:** The situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank

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## Introduction

The Gaza Strip and the West Bank form the two principal territories envisaged for a future Palestinian state. Yet, they are geographically separated and have developed under different systems of control. Israel occupied both during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war; the West Bank includes East Jerusalem, while Gaza lies on the Mediterranean coast between Israel and Egypt. The Oslo process of the 1990s created the Palestinian Authority (PA) and treated Gaza and the West Bank as a single territorial unit, but permanent-status questions including borders, Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, and security were never actually resolved. Since 2007, political division has further complicated the issue: Fatah, the largest faction within the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), dominates the Palestinian Authority in parts of the West Bank, while its rival Hamas historically governed Gaza. Today, the immediate priorities extend beyond the unresolved territorial dispute to maintaining the fragile Gaza ceasefire, enabling humanitarian relief and reconstruction, stabilising the West Bank, and establishing a workable system of Palestinian governance. These challenges directly affect whether Gaza and the West Bank can ultimately function as parts of a viable two-State solution.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT)

The United Nations term for the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967: the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip.

### Green Line / 1967 lines

The 1949 armistice line separating Israel from the West Bank and Gaza before the 1967 war; it remains the principal international reference point for a negotiated two-State settlement.

### Fatah

The largest political faction within the PLO. It dominates the Palestinian Authority and governs parts of the West Bank.

### Palestinian Authority (PA)

The interim Palestinian self-government body established through the Oslo process. It administers civil affairs and internal security in parts of the West Bank but does not exercise full sovereignty.

## **Hamas**

A Palestinian political and armed movement and a rival of Fatah. It governed Gaza from 2007, independently of the PA.

## **Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)**

An umbrella organisation representing several Palestinian political factions, including Fatah. It represents Palestinians internationally and negotiated the Oslo Accords with Israel.

## **Israeli settlements**

Israeli civilian communities established in territory occupied since 1967. UN Security Council Resolution 2334 states that settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity.

## **Two-State solution**

A negotiated settlement in which an independent Palestinian state and Israel exist side by side in peace and security, generally based on the pre-1967 lines with agreed modifications.

## **Background Information**

### **Origins and the Oslo framework**

The present territorial question is rooted in the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the consequences of the 1967 war, when Israel captured the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza. In 1993, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) signed the Declaration of Principles, followed by the 1995 Interim Agreement (Oslo II). These agreements created limited Palestinian self-government and divided the West Bank into Areas A, B and C. Area A was placed under Palestinian civil and internal-security responsibility; Area B under Palestinian civil administration with overriding Israeli security responsibility; and Area C remained under Israeli control pending negotiations. Oslo II explicitly described the West Bank and Gaza as a “single territorial unit”, but negotiations failed to resolve the permanent-status issues of borders, Jerusalem, refugees, settlements and security. Divergent expectations, continued settlement activity, Palestinian attacks against Israelis, and declining trust weakened the process; the failure of the 2000 Camp David negotiations and outbreak of the Second Intifada effectively ended the intended five-year transition without a permanent agreement.

### **Political and territorial fragmentation**

Israel withdrew its permanent military presence and settlements from inside Gaza in 2005. However, the International Court of Justice has stated that Israel continued to exercise key elements of authority over Gaza, including control over land, sea and air borders and restrictions on movement; consequently, its obligations under the law of occupation did not

entirely end after disengagement. Israel has disputed the characterisation that Gaza remained occupied following its withdrawal. Hamas won the 2006 Palestinian legislative election and, after armed conflict with Fatah, took control of Gaza in 2007. The PA remained dominant in the West Bank, creating two separate Palestinian administrations. Israel and Egypt imposed extensive restrictions on Gaza's borders, while Israel continued to control movement and security in much of the West Bank. Settlement growth, checkpoints, the separation barrier, demolitions and competing claims over East Jerusalem have further fragmented the territory. In 2016, Security Council Resolution 2334 called settlements a major obstacle to the two-State solution; the International Court of Justice's 2024 advisory opinion concluded that Israel's continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is unlawful.

### **Conflict since 7 October 2023 and current conditions**

The conflict entered a far more destructive phase after Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups attacked Israel on 7 October 2023, killing civilians and taking hostages. Israel launched a major military campaign in Gaza, producing extensive civilian casualties, displacement and destruction. A ceasefire took effect on 10 October 2025, ending large-scale hostilities and leading to the return of the remaining Israeli hostages and their remains. However, implementation remains incomplete: Israeli strikes and Palestinian casualties have continued, Hamas and other armed groups have not disarmed, transitional governance arrangements are not yet operating fully in Gaza, and reconstruction remains limited. These unresolved commitments have kept the ceasefire fragile.

A 2026 World Bank-UN-European Union assessment estimated Gaza's recovery and reconstruction needs at about US\$71.5 billion. In September 2026, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported continuing airstrikes and displacement in Gaza, severe water and sanitation pressures, and major shortages affecting essential services. In the West Bank, OCHA reported that settler attacks, demolitions, military operations and movement restrictions remained major drivers of displacement; more than 4,000 Palestinians had been displaced there during 2026 by early September.

### **Why Gaza and the West Bank must be considered together**

The separation of Gaza from the West Bank is not only geographical. Different authorities, border regimes, economies, and security systems make unified Palestinian governance difficult. Yet most international diplomatic frameworks continue to treat both territories as components of one future Palestinian state. The UN General Assembly's 2025 New York Declaration called for Gaza to be unified with the West Bank under the PA and

supported a permanent territorial link between them. Consequently, any durable settlement must address Gaza's reconstruction and security while also preventing further territorial fragmentation in the West Bank.

## **Organisations and Major Countries Involved**

### **Israel**

Israel controls or influences key security, border and movement arrangements affecting both territories and argues that any settlement must provide durable security against attacks by Hamas and other armed groups. Israeli governments have also supported or permitted settlement expansion in the West Bank. Israel has rejected specific international measures that it considers prejudicial to negotiations. Its government has opposed unilateral international recognition of a Palestinian state and maintains that a permanent settlement should result from direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Israel has also rejected the ICJ's 2024 conclusions concerning the legality of its continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

### **State of Palestine / Palestinian Authority**

The State of Palestine and the Palestinian Authority (PA) should be distinguished. Palestine has held UN non-member observer State status since 2012, whereas the PA is the interim administrative body created through the Oslo process. The Fatah-dominated PA, based in Ramallah, exercises limited governmental functions in parts of the West Bank but is not itself the State of Palestine. A central political challenge is whether reformed Palestinian institutions can eventually exercise legitimate and effective governance across both the West Bank and Gaza.

### **Hamas**

Hamas is an Islamist political and armed movement that seized control of Gaza from Fatah in 2007 and subsequently operated its governing institutions there. Its attacks on Israel on 7 October 2023, including attacks on civilians and hostage-taking, transformed the conflict. Under the post-ceasefire framework, however, Hamas's future role is unresolved: its disarmament has not been implemented and transitional arrangements intended to replace its independent rule are not yet fully operating in Gaza. Hamas is designated a terrorist organisation by several states and the European Union.

### **United Nations**

The UN provides humanitarian assistance, refugee services and diplomatic frameworks through bodies including OCHA and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The Security Council and General Assembly have repeatedly supported a negotiated two-State solution, opposed settlement expansion and emphasised the territorial unity of Gaza and the West Bank.

### **United States, Egypt, Qatar, Jordan, European Union**

These actors are central to diplomacy, aid and security arrangements. The United States remains Israel's most influential external partner and a major mediator; Egypt and Qatar have mediated Gaza ceasefire and hostage negotiations; Jordan has direct security and political interests in the West Bank and Jerusalem; and the European Union is a major donor to Palestinian institutions and reconstruction efforts.

### **Possible Solutions**

A viable settlement should begin with sustained cessation of hostilities, protection of civilians, release of hostages and detainees in accordance with negotiated agreements, and predictable humanitarian access. Monitoring mechanisms involving the UN and regional mediators could verify ceasefire obligations and reduce the risk that local incidents trigger renewed large-scale conflicts.

Immediate humanitarian assistance should continue independently of unresolved political negotiations, with sustained access to food, water, medicine, shelter and essential services. Longer-term reconstruction, however, should be coordinated with a credible governance transition rather than delayed until every political and security issue has been settled.

International funding could support a reformed Palestinian administration, municipal services and vetted civilian security institutions, while transparent monitoring could track reconstruction materials and finance. Any disarmament or security-sector reform would require phased implementation and guarantees addressing both Israeli security concerns and Palestinian political rights.

The West Bank dimension must be addressed simultaneously. Measures could include a halt to settlement expansion and forced displacement, stronger protection against settler violence, reduced movement restrictions where security conditions permit, and preservation of land needed for a contiguous Palestinian state. Negotiations should establish an agreed territorial link between Gaza and the West Bank so that Palestinian political and economic institutions can function as a unified system.

Finally, states should revive time-bound final-status negotiations based on

international law and relevant UN resolutions, covering borders, Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security, and mutual recognition.

The 2025 New York Declaration provides one recent framework: two sovereign states, with Gaza and the West Bank unified under one Palestinian government, alongside regional security guarantees and economic integration. Implementation should be measured through concrete milestones, such as sustained ceasefire compliance, unrestricted humanitarian access, functioning Palestinian civilian institutions, agreed security-sector reforms, a halt to settlement expansion and progress towards an agreed territorial link between Gaza and the West Bank. Compliance could be assessed through regular UN reporting to the Security Council, with international financial and diplomatic support released in stages as agreed obligations are fulfilled.

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