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# Colonial Administration, Counterinsurgency Pacification, and Disaster Capitalism in Trump's Plan for Gaza: These Are the Dangers Palestinians Face

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## ABSTRACT

*This article analyzes the governing, security, and economic aspects of the Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict proposed by the US administration, endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2803 (17 November 2025), and further fleshed out in the speeches made by Trump and Kushner at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2026. The governing aspect is an international transitional administration made up of a Board of Peace overseeing the Gaza Executive Board which will, in turn, control the Palestinian National Committee for the Administration of Gaza. The security aspect is an International Stabilization Force, a new Palestinian police force, and the Civil-Military Coordination Center. The economic aspect is a blueprint for international investment in skyscrapers, beachfront hotels, special economic zones, and securitized residential compounds. I draw on the example of Iraq after 2003 but outline the even bigger risks that Palestinians in Gaza face: a colonial administration that could sign Gaza up to the Abraham Accords; a property grab facilitated through the projection of Gaza as "terra nullius"; investment by companies connected to Israel and the UAE supported by the United States' IMEC plan; and permanent Israeli occupation and military violence. I conclude by arguing that only Palestinians, particularly in Gaza, have the right to decide what happens to their land, resources, and future. This requires Palestinian sovereignty and self-determination. Currently, in the absence of self-determination, I argue that there are two spaces where pressure should be applied: state leaders who have joined the Board of Peace and the Palestinian experts on the National Committee.*

## **TAGS:**

*Gaza Conflict, Palestine, Disaster Capitalism*

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## 1 Colonial Administration, Counterinsurgency Pacification, and Disaster Capitalism in Trump's Plan for Gaza: These Are the Dangers Palestinians Face

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On 21 January 2026, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, the Board of Peace and the master plan for Gaza were announced by a rambling combative speech delivered by US President Donald Trump and through a glitzy presentation from his adviser Jared Kushner. Each framed Gaza through different but complementary lenses. Trump announced governance by decree, stressed unconditional support for Israel, and portrayed Israel's genocide in Gaza as part of a global fight against terrorism. Kushner presented Gaza as a real estate and investment opportunity – a potential free market paradise of beachfront skyscrapers, special economic zones, and security-vetted residential areas.

The one line of [Arabic text](#) in Kushner's presentation, intended to announce the Palestinian National Committee for the Administration of Gaza, was written backwards and disconnected, which could be a Freudian slip metaphor for this corporate-authoritarian fantasy. Yet this was further proof that Palestinians have been absent from the formulation of this plan. Because, in this vision, Gaza is not a society that has endured a genocide, but a problem space to be restructured and monetized. Palestinians are not regarded as political actors with rights; instead, they are reduced to being obstacles, risks, or future labor inputs. What is being offered is not peace. In business vernacular, this is a hostile takeover.

The Davos presentations and other comments made by the Trump administration flesh out the [Comprehensive Plan](#) to End the Gaza Conflict, which was announced by the United States in September 2025 and formally endorsed by UN Security Council [Resolution 2803](#) on 17 November 2025. While some of its features are still unknown, a clearer picture is now emerging of the governance, security, and economic framework being imposed on Gaza, which I will refer to collectively as the Comprehensive Plan.

In terms of governance, three institutions have been created: the Board of Peace, the Gaza Executive Board, and the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza. While presented as an example of an "international transitional administration" they are better understood as a form of colonial administration. The Board of Peace is endorsed with "international legal personality" by UN Security Council Resolution 2803, which means it can change laws and enter into diplomatic and other agreements.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> States are the paradigmatic example of an "international legal personality".

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In terms of security, there are also three institutions: an International Stabilization Force, a newly trained and vetted Palestinian police force, and the Civil-Military Coordination Center in Kiryat Gat, southern Israel. While presented as an example of post-conflict stabilization, these are better understood as a counterinsurgency operation.

In terms of the economy, the funds to implement the blueprint for Gaza's future will be raised and disbursed by the Board of Peace and the Gaza Executive Board, which will also ultimately decide what happens to Gaza's land, natural resources, infrastructure, and property laws. While this is being presented as post-conflict reconstruction through the free market, these arrangements are better understood through the framework of disaster capitalism.

There is no doubt that Palestinians in Gaza just want the bombs to stop and to access food, shelter, and medical services. Yet the genocide continues while Gaza remains under blockade and bombardment. The October 2025 ceasefire has not ended Israel's killing of Palestinians and has not opened Gaza to the humanitarian aid required to prevent further suffering and fatalities. Resolving this emergency situation must be everyone's immediate concern.

My worry is that, in the medium to long term, Gaza's land, resources, and future will be sold off by those in control – i.e., the founding members of the Board of Peace/Gaza Executive Board – who have no desire to preserve Gaza as a Palestinian space. Palestinian communities in the West Bank, already fragmented into disconnected enclaves, are experiencing the type of military violence, encirclement, and closures imposed on Gaza for decades; so, they will be [next](#) for this treatment because what happens in Gaza will not stay in Gaza.

I draw on the example of Iraq after 2003 because it offers the most insight and warnings of what could happen in Gaza. First, Iraq had an international transitional administration – the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) – under the control of the United States and driven by a free-market business agenda. Second, it experienced US/UK led counterinsurgency military operations, which were brutal and disastrous for Iraqi human life and society. And third, that the CPA's colonialist, undemocratic character facilitated asset grabbing and the abuse of reconstruction funds. But Iraq was at least a sovereign state and transitioned back into being one.

Palestinians in Gaza face even greater dangers. First, the Board of Peace/Gaza Executive Board could sign Gaza up to the Abraham Accords, which means full diplomatic normalisation with Israel without an end to occupation. Second, a property grab facilitated through the projection of Gaza as *terra nullius* and investment by companies connected to Israel and the UAE supported by the United States' IMEC (India

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Middle East Corridor) plan. And third, permanent Israeli control with perpetual military violence against any Palestinian resistance.<sup>2</sup>

The article concludes by arguing that the most important message that needs to be continually insisted upon is that only Palestinians, particularly in Gaza, have the right to decide what happens to their land, resources, and future, and how reconstruction is conducted in a way that benefits them. This requires Palestinian sovereignty and self-determination; the struggle continues towards this goal. Currently, in the absence of self-determination, I suggest two spaces where pressure could be applied: state leaders on the Board of Peace and the Palestinian experts on the National Committee.

## Governing Gaza: The Rhetoric Is Transitional Administration, the Reality Is Colonial Rule

Donald Trump's statements and policies are often confusing, and this is also the case regarding the [announcement](#) of the three institutions he created to govern Gaza: the Board of Peace, the Gaza Executive Board, and the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza.

The Board of Peace (BoP) is to be chaired for life by Donald Trump, in a capacity beyond his role as president of the United States. So, when the American people decide they have had enough of Trump, the rest of the world will still have to deal with him. Trump has sole executive authority and appointed founding members Tony Blair, Marco Rubio, Steve Witkoff, Jared Kushner, Marc Rowen, Ajay Banga, Robert Gabriel, and Nickolay Mladenov. Membership of the BoP is decided by Trump; invitation letters have been sent to state leaders, but membership can be removed at any time by Trump. We have already seen one invitation [rescinded](#) – to Canada, for prime minister Mark Carney's [speech](#) at Davos, which was critical of Trump. Tellingly, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has [joined](#) the BoP. Membership of the BoP is limited to three years unless US\$1 billion is paid for life membership. The BoP will first address Gaza and then move on to other global "hotspots."

Not only will the BoP undermine the UN and international law, as [critics](#) have warned, it also indicates Trump's desire to rule the world in a direct imperial fashion. States that Trump does not like will have no influence or vote in this "nimble and effective international peacebuilding body." In Trump's invitation [letter](#) to heads of state, which does not mention Palestine or Gaza, he refers to the BoP as a "new International Organization and Transitional Governing Administration": a role that goes well beyond what UN Security Council Resolution 2803 mandated. The BoP was mandated (with authorization until 31 December 2027) to act as Gaza's temporary government with the

<sup>2</sup> *Terra nullius* is a Latin term meaning "nobody's land." It is used in international law to describe territory not under the sovereignty of any state, making it available for acquisition by occupation. It has been used most notoriously in settler colonial contexts to take ownership of already-inhabited land, such as Australia.

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power to administer civil affairs, coordinate reconstruction, and oversee institutional rebuilding. The Gaza Executive Board (GEB) is to be the organization carrying out BoP wishes. The division of labor between the BoP and the GEB is not yet clear, but both the BoP and the GEB are [colonial](#) institutions that [infringe](#) Palestinians' right to self-determination.

The [Gaza Executive Board](#) includes the founding members of the BoP listed above, joined by Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, Qatari diplomat Ali Thawadi, Egyptian intelligence chief Hassan Rashad, UAE Minister of International Cooperation Reem Al-Hashimy, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Sigrid Kaag, and Israeli-Cypriot billionaire businessman Yakir Gabay. Nickolay Mladenov is to serve as the high representative to Gaza.

In its 16 January 2026 presidential [statement](#), the White House confirmed that more names would be added to the BoP and the GEB as invitations were accepted. A leaked BoP resolution dated [22 January](#) added two further names: Trump's chief of staff Susan Wiles and real estate lawyer Martin Edelman who is also an advisor to the UAE government. It is crucial to bear in mind that the founding members of the BoP are unlikely to oppose Israel, so I have included a few sentences on these people at the end of this article (see Annex 1).

The Comprehensive Plan continues the same processes from the early 1990s of tying other states and organizations into a committee dominated by the United States, prioritizing and embedding Israel's control over Palestinians, limiting UN involvement although window-dressing these limits by co-opting some UN officials, and creating Palestinian institutions without sovereignty. The Comprehensive Plan is the most extreme version yet, because of the BoP's full control over the future of Gaza's land and resources.

The BoP and the GEB will oversee the Palestinian experts in the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza, chaired by former Palestinian Authority minister and development specialist Ali Shaath (see Annex 2 for the list). All major Palestinian factions have welcomed the formation of the National Committee and it has received [popular support](#). Hamas is excluded, it is still unclear whether the Palestinian Authority or the PLO will play any role, and around half of the experts were proposed by the UAE and are [connected](#) to Mohammad Dahlan's Fateh faction, the Democratic Reform bloc. Predictably, Israel interfered in its creation by vetoing some names proposed and has been blocking its operations from the start, as [documented](#) by Palestinian Gaza expert Muhammad Shehade.

The BoP/GEB is being presented as an example of an international "transitional administration" which is a temporary governance structure created to maintain a territory in a period of profound change particularly after conflict, state collapse, or succession. In the past, some transitional administrations had a mandate from the UN

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Security Council, e.g., Kosovo (UNMIK, 1999-) and East Timor (UNTAET, 1999-2002), and some were created through agreements with the affected state, e.g., Cambodia, (UNTAC, 1992-93).<sup>3</sup>

In Iraq, after the 2003 US-UK military invasion which overthrew the Ba'athist government, the United States created a Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) without a UN Security Council resolution and without agreement with the affected state. The CPA's role was later noted in UN Security Council Resolution 1483 (May 2003) that acknowledged the United States and the UK as occupying powers – this is a crucial difference from UN Security Council Resolution 2803 which I will return to later. Similarly, after the 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan, the Bonn Agreement established the Interim Authority with Afghan factions, which was then endorsed through UN Security Council Resolution 1378 (November 2001).

In international legal terms, transitional administrations are regarded as tools to ensure peace and security, which is why they should be mandated by a UN Security Council resolution. Yet transitional administrations are not always administered by an international organization such as the UN. Whether they are established by the UN or by occupying powers, the existence and operations of transitional administrations raise serious issues related to sovereignty, legitimacy, and accountability.

Although the term “transitional administration” became common in the 1990s, the practice of the internationally-supervised governance of territories is much older.<sup>4</sup> The League of Nations mandates, for instance, established in the aftermath of the first world war, were given to individual states to administer the former Germany colonial territories and the territories of the Ottoman Empire. The British Mandate over Palestine is the obvious relevant case here. While mandates were supervised by the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission, oversight was limited; mandatory powers had the discretion to act like colonial administrators.<sup>5</sup> The example of Palestine also shows that the Palestinian people have continually been denied their rights even when international organizations, such as the League of Nations and the UN, have been involved in deciding their fate.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1990s, because of the end of the Cold War and the shift to a unipolar system under US global hegemony, the UN and major Western powers were willing – and, in some cases, expected – to intervene in collapsed or war-torn states through “muscular” peacekeeping missions with enforcement mandates and blueprints for peacebuilding. In the 2000s, this was supplemented by the “[responsibility to protect](#)” doctrine which enshrined the principle that the UN and its member states should intervene when a

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<sup>3</sup> Other examples of transitional administration administered by the UN include West New Guinea (1962-63) to transfer governing from the Netherlands to Indonesia, and Namibia (1989-1990), to implement independence after South Africa withdrew from occupying it.

<sup>4</sup> Chesterman, *You, the People*; Zaum, *Sovereignty Paradox*.

<sup>5</sup> Kattan, *From Coexistence*.

<sup>6</sup> Imseis, *United Nations*.

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state fails to protect its civilians against war crimes and crimes against humanity. The idea and perceived legitimacy of transitional administrations flourished in this context. Indeed, in [May 2003](#), Martin Indyk, former US Ambassador to Israel and staunch supporter of Israel, proposed an international administration for Palestine in the journal *Foreign Affairs*.

While the transitional administrations in East Timor, Kosovo, and Namibia are touted as model examples of the UN assisting territories into sovereignty, the instance where the United States had the most control was the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Iraq after 2003. This setting offers the most insight and warnings of what could happen in Gaza. After my analysis of the security and economic aspects of the Comprehensive Plan, I outline some lessons from Iraq that offer warnings on what Gaza might face.

### Securing Gaza: The Rhetoric Is Stabilization, the Reality Is Counterinsurgency

The security component of the Comprehensive Plan includes three institutions: the International Stabilization Force (ISF), the newly vetted Palestinian police force, and the Civil-Military Coordination Center.

The ISF is to field 10,000 troops and operate under the command of US Major General Jasper Jeffers who has military experience in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Lebanon. The ISF is not a UN peacekeeping mission; it is a coalition force operating under UN Security Council authorization. Russia and China abstained from the vote on UN Security Council Resolution 2803 and have declined participation. The United States has made [70 formal](#) requests to countries to contribute troops, but the list of participating countries was not confirmed at the time of writing.

The core tasks of the ISF are to forcibly disarm and demobilize Hamas and other armed groups, destroy any military infrastructure, and enable a stable environment for humanitarian operations and the governing institutions of Gaza. It shares several traits with the NATO-led stabilization force that entered Kosovo in 1999, but there the rationale was to protect the Kosovar Albanian population from Serbian military violence.<sup>7</sup> Protecting civilians is part of the ISF mandate, but it is not clear who the ISF is protecting Palestinians in Gaza from because its mandate does not name Israel which is clearly the [biggest threat](#) to Palestinian civilian life and infrastructure. Instead, the ISF regards Israel's security as its primary concern.

The first sentence of the annex to UNSC Resolution 2803 states: "Gaza will be a de-radicalized terror-free zone that does not pose a threat to its neighbors." The ISF is

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<sup>7</sup> "Ensuring the withdrawal and preventing the return into Kosovo of Federal and Republic military, police and paramilitary forces." UN Security Council Resolution 1224 (1999)  
<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/274488?ln=en&v=pdf#files>

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authorized to use “all necessary measures” to destroy and prevent the rebuilding of “military and terror infrastructure,” to oversee Israel’s military withdrawal, and to “provide support” for a new Palestinian police force. This means the ISF has a proactive militarized mandate designed to confront armed resistance: more closely resembling a counterinsurgency operation, than a traditional peacekeeping mission.

The second security institution is a new Palestinian police force vetted by Israel and the United States. It is being trained by the United States Security Coordinator (USSC), which is an institution created during the last plan (the 2003 “Roadmap”) imposed upon a Palestinian uprising (the second intifada). The head of the USSC is Michael R. Fenzel, a lieutenant-general in the US military. Fenzel was [accused in 2025](#) by his chief of staff Colonel Gabavics of appeasing Israel and covering up the intentional shooting of Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in May 2022 by an Israeli soldier.

The third security institution is the [Civil-Military Coordination Center](#) (CMCC) in Kiryat Gat, southern Israel. This was established by the United States Central Command (CENCOM), with 200 military personnel, mostly American but with some from other countries. It is led by [Aryeh Lightstone](#), a prominent Zionist within the Trump administration, who is also serving as an advisor to the BoP/GEB. Israel plays a [decisive role](#), whereas Palestinians have [no influence](#) in the CMCC.

In the absence of a firm commitment and detailed strategy for Palestinian self-determination, these security institutions will quash Palestinian resistance and pacify the population of Gaza – by military means and by mediating the provision of goods through humanitarian aid and logistical support for reconstruction. These are long-established counterinsurgency (COIN) techniques.<sup>8</sup>

COIN techniques were initially developed by colonial powers to manage and defeat indigenous resistance. They evolved from use during “small wars” fought on the peripheries of empire into a formalized doctrine aimed at controlling the civilian population, rather than just enemy combatants. In addition to brute military force, the British developed strategies to control local political elites. For instance, Britain’s manipulation of Egyptian and Iraqi politics from the 1920s to 1950s was designed to prevent economic and foreign policies that would threaten Britain’s interests in the region.

The United States has also long used COIN strategies in the Western hemisphere (the Monroe Doctrine), globally during the Cold War to control or defeat nationalist and socialist movements (from the Truman Doctrine to the Reagan Doctrine), and during its “global war on terror” after 2001 (the Bush Doctrine). Following its invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the “forever wars” these unleashed, the United States updated COIN principles and concepts for the 21st century. However, no amount of modern or technical language can hide COIN’s imperialist origins and purpose.

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<sup>8</sup> The following description of the history of COIN borrows heavily from Turner, *Peacebuilding as Counterinsurgency*.

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"Stabilization" in United States COIN policy terms means ensuring stability for the US-dominated global system, for its allies, and for global trade and supply chains. The gentler term "integrated civil-military action" also operationalizes a central understanding of counterinsurgency: as well as defeating and disarming opponents, longer-term population control is 75 percent political/administrative and only 25 percent military/kinetic.

The "alternative safe communities" being built in Gaza – of population blocs vetted and controlled by the ISF and Israel – is a classic COIN practice. On [21 January 2026](#), David Petraeus, US army general during the American occupation of Iraq and former CIA director, visited and briefed the CMCC in Kiryat Gan. Petraeus, long credited with resurrecting COIN for Iraq and Afghanistan, has repeatedly recommended to Israel that it employ "gated securitised communities" in Gaza.<sup>9</sup>

Palestine has long been a central site of COIN techniques.<sup>10</sup> These were developed first by the British in the occupation and Mandate period, then by Israel after 1948 against Palestinians who remained inside Israel, and extended to Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem after 1967 when Israel occupied the remaining parts of historic Palestine.

A few analysts, including myself, argue that Western donors and the Oslo framework created after 1993 enacted a form of counterinsurgency by controlling the Palestinian Authority through providing or cutting off aid and tying it into security coordination with Israel.<sup>11</sup> In the absence of restrictions on Israel, this framework provided the backdrop for Israel to continue its settler colonial project and COIN operations such as military violence in the West Bank and "mowing the grass" in Gaza – the despicable dehumanizing metaphor Israel uses for killing Palestinians by mass bombing.

Israel has long confirmed that security coordination with the Palestinian Authority, under the auspices of the USSC, is its main priority. One central aspect of the Comprehensive Plan is the extension of the Palestinian police force, trained and controlled by the USSC, to Gaza – the first time since the split between the West Bank and Gaza in 2007.

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<sup>9</sup> Now retired from public office, David Petraeus now works for KKR, a private equity company with business interests in Gaza, as documented by Jonathan Witthall in [January 2026](#).

<sup>10</sup> Khalili, *The Location of Palestine*.

<sup>11</sup> Turner, *Peacebuilding as Counterinsurgency*. Bhungalia, *Elastic Empire*.

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### Rebuilding Gaza: The Rhetoric Is Reconstruction, the Reality Is Disaster Capitalism

The political economy component of the Comprehensive Plan dictates both the reconstruction of Gaza's infrastructure and services and the future of Gaza's land and resources.

According to Kushner's [masterplan](#), Gaza will become a "catastrophic success," transformed with free market principles into glitzy beach resorts and business districts. Infrastructure and services will be rebuilt by geographical zones in a phased process starting in the south in Rafah and moving north to Gaza City. The whole coast will be developed for tourism with skyscraper hotels and pristine boulevards, mimicking Trump's [February](#) 2025 social media AI-generated image of him with Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu drinking cocktails in the new "[Riveria](#)" of the Middle East. All or large parts of Gaza will be a free economic zone subject to excessive tax exemptions and poor regulatory frameworks for labor and environmental protections.

Further elements of the masterplan outline an airport, a seaport, and integrated transportation connecting Gaza internally and presumably externally as part of the India Middle East Corridor ([IMEC](#)) proposed by the United States to compete against the Chinese "belt and road" initiative. Nothing has been said publicly about IMEC going through Gaza yet, but given Trump's interest in the August 2025 [GREAT plan](#) (Gaza Reconstitution, Economic Acceleration, and Transformation) which does propose this idea, plus the founding members of the Board of Peace/Gaza Executive Board, it is highly likely. This is a billionaire investor's fantasy supported directly by US defense strategy.

To make matters even more alarming, the Comprehensive Plan is based on the idea of *terra nullius* – a Gaza where land is owned by no one, ripe for the taking, because Palestinians have been forced into tents or into exile in Egypt. In June 2025, the Trump think tank the Heritage Foundation argued that "[Gaza](#) is one of the very few pieces of land not under the sovereignty of any nation, a status known as *terra nullius* in international law." This is a mandate for land grabbing. The question is: will reconstruction take place without addressing the issue of individual or community land ownership by Palestinians in Gaza? Again, given the founding members of the Board of Peace/Gaza Executive Board we should assume the worst.

The [estimated](#) US \$25 billion needed for Gaza's reconstruction will be raised by the Board of Peace and through an investment conference to be held in Washington DC. No restrictions have been announced on who can invest, and I doubt any will be made, at least not against any approved by the US administration. We should expect Zionist billionaires, who have been buying property in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, to participate, eager to gain a stake in Gaza – and then who knows what could happen in

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the future, because ownership is king. Do Palestinians have deeds to property in Gaza? Will the Board of Peace/Gaza Executive Committee care if they do? The jury is out.

Reconstruction will provide infrastructure and a future to a population that has experienced over two years of genocide. This is crucial. However, under the current Comprehensive Plan, Palestinians will eventually be relocated to heavily policed urban zones, providing cheap labor for businesses – hi-tech, tourism, and industrial zones – which will suck profit out of Gaza for the benefit of its billionaire investors. This dynamic is the essence of what Canadian journalist Naomi Klein refers to as “disaster capitalism.”

In July 2025, I co-authored an [article](#) with Palestinian political economist Nur Arafah that outlined what we referred to as the “seeds” of disaster capitalism in four separate day-after plans for Gaza. We argued that the processes of disaster capitalism are facilitated by governance structures imposed without local consent. These processes include capturing and exploiting reconstruction funds, grabbing land and natural resources such as the reserves of gas off the coast of Gaza, and other aspects of accumulation by dispossession. We drew on the insights in Klein’s 2007 book *The Shock Doctrine*, which coined the term “disaster capitalism” to capture how conflicts, natural disasters, and other crises create a favorable environment for political and economic elites to disempower and dispossess communities.<sup>12</sup>

Arafah and I argued that Gaza risks becoming another setting for disaster capitalism, following earlier instances in Iraq and Afghanistan. We also pointed out that Palestinians face unique dangers under Israeli settler colonialism because it seeks to displace the Palestinian population and seize their land to expand Israeli-Jewish ownership and control.

Now, in January 2026, I am even more convinced that our worries and predictions are accurate. In the Comprehensive Plan, Gaza will be governed by a colonial administration supported by counterinsurgency military operations and sold off to international investors. The experience of Iraq after 2003 offers some insights into the dangers that Palestinians in Gaza face.

## Iraq after 2003: Lessons for Palestinians Today

In 2003, the Iraqi Ba’athist government was overthrown by a US-UK led military invasion without a UN Security Council resolution. Ostensibly undertaken to disarm Iraq of nuclear weapons, the real reason was the United States’ attempt to implement the [Project](#) for the New American Century – a neoconservative agenda to remake the Middle East by turning anti-Western states into allies and to open-up formerly closed

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<sup>12</sup> Klein, *Shock Doctrine*.

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state-controlled economies to Western business interests. This was neoliberalism imposed through the barrel of a gun.

It is clear the Trump administration has similar desires on other countries in the Middle East and beyond – to access resources, make money, expand US military bases and the Abraham Accords, and counteract what it perceives as the threat to its global dominance by China.

Directly after the invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of the Ba'athist regime, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was set up by the United States with Paul Bremer, an American official, as its chief executive. Bremer was neither an Iraq specialist nor a specialist in post-conflict reconstruction; he had been involved in homeland security companies and political risk insurance but was part of an elite group of neoconservatives in the United States.<sup>13</sup>

Trump is not the first president to prefer that businessmen run American foreign policy.

Various US-led and coalition forces, including the Multinational Force-Iraq (MNF-I), were involved in counterinsurgency “stabilization” in the aftermath of the invasion. The whole experience dragged many actors into Iraq including NATO and the UN. The disastrous policies of the CPA, particularly the purging of all Ba'athist influence in Iraqi society (“de-Ba'athification”), and the brutality of the MNF-I, provoked a deadly insurgency, civil war, and the emergence of Daesh (ISIS).

The security institutions “stabilizing” Gaza are operating in a context where there are no steps set out towards Palestinian self-determination and where the disaster capitalist processes of dispossession will be implemented. This combination will provoke opposition; perhaps not now because the Palestinian population is in shock and trapped in a daily struggle for survival, but in the future we will see similar cycles of resistance and counterinsurgency violence play out.

In Iraq, the CPA was authoritarian and lacked democratic oversight or accountability mechanisms. In [May 2004](#), UN special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi called Bremer “the dictator of Iraq. He has the money. He has the signature.” The reconstruction of Iraq was controlled and directed by the CPA and other United States officials. There was a huge pot of public money – the United States initially pledged US \$38bn, and there were funds from other sources: US \$15bn from other countries, US \$20bn from Iraq. Businesses headquartered in the United States received more than 80 percent of these reconstruction funds. Some of the largest recipients were politically well-connected companies such as Bechtel, Blackwater, and Halliburton.<sup>14</sup> For instance, Bush's special

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<sup>13</sup> Dodge, *Enemy Images*.

<sup>14</sup> Klein, *Shock Doctrine*, p.346.

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envoy James Baker was on Bechtel's payroll, and Vice President Dick Cheney was on the board of Halliburton and receiving financial benefits.<sup>15</sup>

I urge readers to look at the business interests of the founding members of the Board of Peace and those on the Gaza Executive Board because I am convinced they will be feathering their nests from Gaza's reconstruction funds. We must follow the money over the next few years.

*Washington Post* journalist Rajiv Chandrasekaran provides an eye-popping account of the political economy of the "green zone" in Baghdad where foreign troops and administrators lived, and the abuse of power and corruption that resulted from the billions of dollars provided for reconstruction.<sup>16</sup>

I have no doubt that in ten-to-fifteen years we will be reading similar accounts of corruption related to the reconstruction funds for Gaza.

In addition to facilitating war profiteering, the CPA changed the property and economic laws governing Iraq. Within the first few months, Bremer passed laws that assisted foreign business interests: he lowered Iraq's corporate tax from 45 percent to 15 percent, foreign investors could now own 100% percent of Iraqi companies and could repatriate 100% percent of the profits. Laws were written in secret between the United States and foreign companies; opposition led to the [arrests](#) of Iraqi labor union leaders. Accountancy firm BearingPoint was paid to build a masterplan for a free market-based economy and the Bush administration put hundreds of advisers in key positions across Iraqi institutions and sectors. Advice on policies towards capturing state resources through privatization was subcontracted to companies selected by USAID.<sup>17</sup> Occupying powers are [not supposed to](#) change the laws of a country, but to govern it in trust until the occupation ends. By this standard, Bremer's CPA committed a war crime. Yet no one has been held accountable; on the contrary, Bremer was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and is enjoying his retirement as a ski instructor in Vermont.

In Iraq, there was clear evidence of corruption by US companies and officials. In March 2013, the Special Auditor's final report to the US Congress concluded that of the US \$51 billion from the United States to rebuild Iraq US \$6-8 billion was wasted or not accounted for, that mismanagement was rife, and there was widespread corruption.<sup>18</sup> Some American individuals and companies were [prosecuted](#), convicted, or paid settlements for their corrupt use of Iraq reconstruction money.

Dozens of global companies have financially benefited from Israel's genocide in Gaza and its occupation and oppression of Palestinians, as [outlined](#) in a report from UN

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<sup>15</sup> Klein, *Shock Doctrine*, p.313.

<sup>16</sup> Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life*.

<sup>17</sup> Herring, *Neoliberalism*.

<sup>18</sup> Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, *Learning from Iraq*.

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special rapporteur for Palestine Francesca Albanese, in July 2025. No doubt many global companies will also profit from the reconstruction of Gaza.

The Iraq experience shows that when international officials, particularly those who are ideologically driven and connected with big business interests, are given unchecked power and access to limitless sources of funds, then corruption is facilitated and the local population loses out. Of course, Gaza is in an even worse situation than Iraq – because Iraq was a sovereign state and it transitioned back to being one. Palestine is not.

Even more worryingly, the Board of Peace is endorsed with “international legal personality” by UN Security Council Resolution 2803, which means it can change laws and enter into diplomatic and other agreements. The US-led CPA in Iraq did not have this status – it was an administrative authority of the occupying powers, so it was subject to the laws of occupation. This international legal nuance did not appear to constrain the CPA. But the BoP/GEC face even fewer constraints and obstacles to selling off Gaza’s resources and giving preferential access to reconstruction funds to businesses with no interest in preserving Gaza as Palestinian.

An essential issue when considering these lessons from Iraq is to look at the individuals involved. The Bush administration was driven by the ideas of the Project for the New American Century. Central figures in the US administration during the war in Iraq – Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Bremer, and Elliott Abrams – were neoconservatives who were also in key administration positions during the US support for military juntas in Latin America.

Compare this with the current cast. The Trump administration is driven by a right-wing Christian nationalist MAGA (Make America Great Again) agenda. Central figures in Trump’s administration are Zionists with deep connections with Israel and Israel lobby organizations in the United States. The founding members of the Board of Peace and the Gaza Executive Committee have no interest in Palestinian well-being.

## **Conclusion: Finding Spaces to Oppose the Worst Possible Outcomes**

As documented by many Palestinian analysts, the United States has never been an honest broker between Palestine and Israel, and no recent administration has kept up the façade of neutrality. Every Western plan for “peace” between Israel and Palestine – from Oslo I and II, to the 2003 Roadmap to Peace, through to Trump’s Comprehensive Plan – has prioritized Israel’s interests, only ever recommends change and reform on the Palestinian side, and enlists the United States to oversee peace negotiations. These negotiations have never delivered Palestinian self-determination and are arguably

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designed not to.<sup>19</sup> In the absence of a just solution, these plans are counterinsurgency strategies designed to control Palestinians by dangling the possibility of statehood and aid funds, while Israel continues to accumulate more Palestinian land and resources from the river to the sea.

Now, with the Comprehensive Plan for Gaza, counterinsurgency has been coupled with colonial administration, which provides the potential for disaster capitalist profiteering and resource-grabbing. Concealed by the *language* of empire in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: transitional administration is the preferred moniker over colonial rule, stabilization a softer more acceptable name for counterinsurgency, and post-conflict reconstruction masks disaster capitalism. The only way to fully prevent these dangers is for Palestinian self-determination and sovereignty to be implemented, not delayed to a distant day off in the future that never arrives. The struggle continues towards this goal.

But what can be done in a situation that looks so overwhelmingly bleak? Currently, in the absence of self-determination, there are two spaces to apply pressure.

The first space is state leaders who join the Board of Peace. They must be pressured by Palestinians and their allies to ensure that Gaza's land and resources are not sold off to investors, especially not those connected with Israel. Gaza is not *terra nullius* and must be preserved as Palestinian. The danger of the Board of Peace signing Gaza into the Abraham Accords is real, would be perceived by most Palestinians as a betrayal of their national cause, and should be opposed.

The second space is the Palestinian National Committee for the Administration of Gaza. These Palestinian experts are well respected, enjoy popular support, and could develop reconstruction plans with the best intentions. But the Board of Peace and Gaza Executive Board are ultimately in control and are more likely to serve Israel's interests and those of external investors than the interests of Palestinians. We know this. Palestinians, in Gaza and beyond, must mobilize to support the Palestinian National Committee but also keep it accountable and grounded because this is the only way in which these Palestinian experts will not be co-opted into the colonialist circus and greedy grabbing of Gaza's assets.

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### Annex 1: Founding Members of the Board of Peace and Gaza Executive Board

By 27 January 2026, the following names had been confirmed.

**Tony Blair** was UK prime minister when the US-UK invaded Iraq in 2003 and overthrew the Ba'athist regime, provoked by an American Republican administration staffed by right-wing

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<sup>19</sup> Khalidi and Samour, *Neoliberalism as Statebuilding*.

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ideologues. From 2007, Blair was the Quartet Representative for the Middle East Peace Process supposed to oversee the “Roadmap” – the plan imposed on Palestinians to end the second intifada and purportedly established to kickstart peace negotiations. Blair's tenure was **highly criticized**, particularly that he focused on technical details related to Palestinian statebuilding rather than strategies to stop Israel's settler colonial practices, because of his business connections, and that he appeared very willing to do the bidding of the United States. It is well known that the Palestinian Authority leadership was resentful of him, including Nabil Shaath, the father of Ali Shaath who is chairing the Palestinian National Committee.

United States secretary of state **Marco Rubio** has a strong collaborative relationship with the Heritage Foundation, the right-wing think tank that writes the blueprints for Trump's administration. He is a supporter of right-wing governments in Latin America and has been instrumental in Trump's “Donroe Doctrine” – a policy to ensure US dominance in the Western hemisphere. He is obsessed with Cuba, Iran and China, advocating “maximum pressure” policies towards all three. More importantly for our understanding here, **Rubio** is a Zionist and publicly supports Israel, regards Palestinians as the obstacle to peace, is critical of any attempt to rein in Israel, and is supported by funds from the Israel lobby group AIPAC.

**Steve Witkoff**, US special envoy for peace missions (formerly special envoy to the Middle East), is a billionaire property magnate with extensive business ties in the Middle East. Involved in the ceasefire and hostage exchange negotiations, Witkoff is regarded as a hard negotiator. Palestinian analyst Mouin Rabbani **refers** to Witkoff as the latest “dishonest broker.”

Trump's son-in-law **Jared Kushner**, who serves as a senior adviser to Trump, is another billionaire real estate developer. Shrouded in controversy – from accusations of nepotism, to his security clearance, to conflicts of interest – Kushner was the main **broker** of the Abraham Accords. He is also **credited** with being the first to state that Gaza's waterfront is very valuable property and **advocated** the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in Gaza to the Naqab desert in southern Israel. The Kushner family have been **close** friends with Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu for decades.

**Marc Rowen** is a billionaire businessman and was a big funder to the 2020 Trump presidential campaign. He has been **instrumental** in attacks on universities, freedom of speech, workers' rights, and protests against Israel at university campuses. In 2023, Rowen tried to organize a **boycott** of University of Pennsylvania donors over it hosting the Palestine Writes festival and in December 2025 **accused** incoming New York City mayor Zohran Mamdani of antisemitism.

**Ajay Banga**, a business executive millionaire and director of the World Bank Group, is more associated with the US Democratic Party and has **talked** in the past about food insecurity, climate change, and diversity. He is a strong **supporter** of India's prime minister Narendra Modi and a key proponent of the India-Middle East Corridor (IMEC), the US's strategic alternative to China's “belt and road initiative”.

**Robert Gabriel** is Trump's deputy national security adviser, former television producer, and speech writer for Trump during his first presidency.

Former UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (2015-2020) **Nickolay Mladenov** is the BoP's high representative with a remit to supervise the Palestinian National Committee. Mladenov served as UN special representative to the UN mission in Iraq 2013-2015, so presumably saw some of the impacts of the US-UK invasion and the disastrous policies of the Coalition Provisional Authority. Since 2022, he has **served** as the director general of the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy in the UAE, and is a “**distinguished** visiting fellow” at the Israel lobby think tank the Washington Institute for Near East Peace (WINEP). Mladenov was **named** in the 2021 Pandora Papers, which exposed political and business elites' secret offshore accounts.

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Trump's chief of staff **Susan Wiles** worked for Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu during his 2020 election campaign, dispatched to assist him by Trump during his first presidency.

Real estate lawyer **Martin Edelman** is an advisor to the UAE government and has been described as the "**power broker**" between the US administration and Abu Dhabi. He has been instrumental in high profile investment deals for the UAE.

Other members of the Gaza Executive Board that have been **listed** include Turkish Foreign Minister **Hakan Fidan**, Qatari diplomat **Ali Thawadi**, Egyptian intelligence chief **Hassan Rashad**, UAE Minister of International Cooperation **Reem Al-Hashimy**, **Sigrid Kaag** UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and **Yakir Gabay** an Israeli Cypriot billionaire businessman.

At the time of writing, the media was reporting on invitations to various world leaders to join the Board of Peace and other individuals to join the Gaza Executive Board. There is much more that could be written, but the above is a small glimpse of the CVs of those involved with the BoP and GEB. I left Donald Trump out, because we all have a good idea of his politics. Trump is a complex character, and he has shown willingness to override Netanyahu, but it is unlikely that he or the wider Republican administration will become critics of Israel anytime soon.

### Annex 2: Members of the Palestinian National Committee for the Administration of Gaza

By 27 January 2026, the following names had been confirmed:

Chair: Ali Shaath, an academic who holds a doctorate in engineering and has served in several positions in the Palestinian Authority.

Ayed Abu Ramadan: economy, trade, and industry.

Adnan Abu Warda: the justice sector.

Abed Alkarim Ashour: agriculture.

Ali Barhoum: municipalities and water services.

Jabr al-Daur: education.

Rami Tawfiq Helles: religious affairs.

Husni al-Mughni: tribal affairs.

Sami Nasman: internal affairs and internal security.

Bashir Al-Rayes: finance.

Usama al-Saydawi: land and housing.

Omar Shamali: telecommunications.

Ayed Yaghi: health.

Hana Tarzi: social and women's affairs.

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