Policy Paper

A Strategy for Overcoming the Palestinian Impasse

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Abstract

A Strategy for Overcoming the Palestinian Impasse

The Palestinian impasse has intensified dangerously in recent years, weakening the Palestinian people's ability to confront existential threats, particularly accelerating efforts at annexation and displacement, as well as attempts to entrench the occupation and impose foreign control over the West Bank (WB) and Gaza Strip (GS).

The impasse is evident in the continued absence of an inclusive national project and consensual vision; the Palestinian Authority's (PA) persistent pursuit of unilateral decision-making and control over national institutions; and the perpetuation of political and geographic division while obstructing reconciliation efforts. This has culminated in the PA leadership's unilateral call for local and general elections, accompanied by political conditions restricting candidates to the PA's program and international commitments. Moreover, divergent positions on Operation al-Aqsa Flood and efforts to confront the grave crimes of genocide in the GS have further deepened the impasse, bringing it to unprecedented levels.

In considering ways out of the Palestinian impasse, ignoring it and its consequences would have serious implications for the Palestine issue, while achieving comprehensive national consensus at this stage appears out of reach. Therefore, containing differences and easing tensions should be treated as a priority and a pragmatic necessity, both to confront existential threats and to establish a minimum level of trust and practical coordination, thereby enabling gradual progress toward consensus and institutional rebuilding.

Keywords:

Palestinian impasse	Palestinian national project	Palestinian schism
National consensus	PLO	Palestinian elections
Existential threats	Palestinian resistance	

A Strategy for Overcoming the Palestinian Impasse

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Introduction

The Palestinian impasse has intensified significantly in recent years, both internally and externally, weakening the Palestinian people’s ability to address domestic challenges and confront external threats. Consequently, these pressures have reached an existential level, posing serious risks to the future of the Palestine issue and the Palestinian national project.

Recognizing the serious long-term implications of the deepening Palestinian impasse, and seeking to contribute to the discussion of its causes, underlying factors, options for addressing it, and ways to overcome it, Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations convened a specialized discussion forum on 2/9/2026, bringing together leading experts and specialists on Palestinian affairs. This policy paper draws on the workshop’s substantive discussions, which offered in-depth analysis, diagnosis, and forward-looking assessments, while also advancing recommendations and proposals for overcoming the impasse.

First: Factors Behind the Escalation of the Palestinian Impasse

Historically, the Palestinian impasse has stemmed from the absence of a consensual, unifying national project; weaknesses in the Palestinian political system and its capacity to represent the Palestinian people, manage political differences and periodically renew its legitimacy through democratic means; and competing visions, strategies, political programs and forms of struggle. Moreover, the system has struggled to accommodate diverse approaches in ways that could turn them into a source of strength, foster complementarity, and expand the options for national action.

The situation deteriorated further following the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, which imposed serious constraints and obligations on the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and, subsequently, the Palestinian Authority (PA). As a result, the Palestinian political situation entered a prolonged and profound crisis from which it has yet to emerge. In practice, the Accords have left the PA primarily with obligations toward the Israeli occupation, while Israel has continued to impose its unilateral vision, emphasizing the

[1] Jordanian journalist and writer of Palestinian origin specializing in political and strategic affairs. He has published hundreds of articles, political analyses, assessments, and policy papers, while maintaining an active presence in broadcast and audiovisual media.

state's Jewish character and rejecting Palestinian statehood. Consequently, the PA has become, at best, a severely constrained authority performing a functional role that it cannot transcend, operating under Israel's occupation and on its terms in administering the Palestinian population in the West Bank (WB) and Gaza Strip (GS).

The crisis of the Palestinian national movement and the broader Palestinian impasse deepened following the Palestinian schism in 2007. It became a key determinant of relations among the various actors in the Palestinian arena, resulting in a distorted dual political and geographic reality and contributing to the declining regional and international standing of the Palestine issue.

Under the influence of these significant factors, the national impasse manifested in a series of interconnected crises: the absence of a unifying national project and consensual national vision; a crisis of political-system legitimacy and the suspension of electoral processes; inadequate representation of the Palestinian people within national institutions; the paralysis of executive and legislative institutions, coupled with the absence of effective mechanisms for accountability and separation of powers; and the schism itself, which produced two competing political, administrative and geographic systems.

Nevertheless, the Palestinian impasse has intensified considerably in recent years, with serious repercussions for the Palestine issue and the Palestinian people's ability to confront the existential threats they face at this critical juncture. The factors exacerbating the impasse can broadly be divided into two levels: internal Palestinian factors and external factors related to the Israeli occupation, regional and international policies, and shifts in the broader political environment.

1. Internal Causes and Contributing Factors

a. The Palestinian schism deepened during Operation al-Aqsa Flood, bringing the widening divide among the components of the Palestinian political system into sharper relief. Disagreements also intensified over how to manage the confrontation with the Israeli occupation and respond to the brutal war of extermination, culminating in the imposition of political, legal and security tutelage over GS by the Board of Peace (BoP). Meanwhile, the PA leadership adopted a position closer to neutrality, aligning its stance with that of the official Arab position while focusing on attacking resistance factions and holding them responsible for the killing and destruction in GS.

b. The crisis of the Palestinian political system also deepened, further weakening its capacity to provide broad-based and effective national representation and eroding confidence in existing national institutions. Consequently, the gap and crisis of trust

between the PA leadership and the Palestinian people widened, as reflected in opinion polls over the years, which have consistently indicated declining support for the PA among Palestinians.[2]

c. The PA leadership's continued consolidation of control over political decision-making and national institutions. In 2025 and 2026, it sought to "reengineer" the Palestinian political system, renew its political legitimacy in accordance with international conditions, reproduce political exclusivity, and legitimize political succession.

   To this end, it introduced a draft interim constitution for the State of Palestine, issued decrees calling for local and general elections, substantially amended the electoral law, and imposed conditions requiring candidates to endorse its political program and international commitments.[3]

   The PA subsequently held local elections under the amended law, followed by a presidential decree setting a date for general elections. The decision sparked considerable debate within the Palestinian arena, as the election date was set without national consensus or guarantees for the participation of Palestinians in Jerusalem. Moreover, ongoing widespread destruction and crimes of extermination in the GS have severely constrained the ability of most residents to participate. The elections were therefore called amid a deeply strained Palestinian political environment, a hard-line and increasingly brutal Israeli environment, and a complex and unfavorable regional and international context.

d. The declining role and influence of many Palestinian factions, as reflected in political, local, student and trade union election results, alongside their limited capacity for meaningful self-assessment and internal review to address shortcomings and strengthen their presence and influence. At the same time, Fatah has experienced growing internal challenges, culminating in its Eighth General Conference, which further consolidated the dominant leadership's control over the movement's institutions and marginalized political opponents of its approach.

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[2] According to an opinion poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) from 5–8/8/2026, only 18% of Palestinians expressed satisfaction with the performance of PA President Mahmud 'Abbas. Meanwhile, 83% said corruption exists within PA institutions, and 65% viewed the PA as a burden on the Palestinian people rather than an achievement.

[3] Article 16 of Decree-Law No. 23 of 2025 on the election of local council members requires candidates on electoral lists to submit a written declaration affirming their commitment to the PLO's program, its international commitments, and international legitimacy resolutions. Likewise, Article 5 of Decree-Law No. 10 of 2026 requires general-election candidates to comply with the Amended Basic Law of 2003 and its amendments, the provisions of this Decree-Law and its amendments, and the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, as well as its political and national program and relevant international legitimacy resolutions.

2. External Factors and Influences, the Most Important of Which Are:

a. The dominance of the extremist Israeli nationalist and religious right in Israel's legislative and executive institutions; the shift in Israeli security doctrine toward increasingly aggressive, expansionist and assertive policies; and the adoption of the far right's vision as official state policy. Consequently, crimes of extermination, destruction and siege in the GS have intensified, while settlement expansion and de facto annexation in the WB have accelerated. The risk of Palestinian displacement from both areas has likewise increased, alongside attacks on Islamic and Christian holy sites and more frequent and extensive incursions into Mosque.

b. The growing alignment of the Donald Trump administration with the Israeli far right and its provision of political cover for advancing annexation measures in the WB, as well as for imposing trusteeship and a mandate over the GS through the BoP. The latter has been tasked with overseeing the Strip's political, administrative, security and economic affairs, with the same model potentially extending to the WB if it succeeds in the GS.

   Meanwhile, international pressure has intensified to target and disarm the resistance, thereby depriving the Palestinian people of various means of struggle and self-defense in confronting continuing Israeli violations.

c. Growing divisions among Arab governments and the declining role of institutions for joint Arab action have further weakened the Arab role in the Palestine issue. Rather than helping protect the Palestinian people from escalating Israeli crimes and threats or promoting Palestinian consensus, some Arab actors have contributed to the schism by siding with one of its parties.

d. The declining European role and influence in the Palestine issue, alongside the erosion of support for the two-state solution despite efforts by some European and Arab countries to revive it as a political framework. These efforts, however, have faced categorical Israeli rejection of the establishment of a Palestinian state.

e. The acceleration of Arab-Israeli normalization and the Abraham Accords, with an increasing number of Arab states establishing political, economic and security ties with Israel. Moreover, these states have continued to pursue normalization despite the brutal crimes of extermination in the GS.

Second: Developments Likely to Affect the Future of the Palestinian Impasse

Several anticipated developments in the coming period are likely to shape the trajectory of the Palestinian impasse. The most significant include:

1. The Palestinian elections scheduled for 28/11/2026. If the PA insists on managing the elections unilaterally, without national consensus, they could become another source of political tension and further deepen the Palestinian impasse.
2. The Israeli elections scheduled for 27/10/2026. Polling suggests that Netanyahu's opponents could secure a parliamentary majority, potentially weakening his prospects of forming the next governing coalition while strengthening his principal rivals, led by Gadi Eisenkot, head of Yashar!. Nevertheless, the differences between Netanyahu and his rivals appear to be driven more by competition for political power than by fundamentally different policy platforms, particularly regarding the management of the Palestine issue and the future of the WB and GS.
3. The US congressional midterm elections on 3/11/2026. Polling suggests that Republicans could lose their House majority. Although the elections' impact on US policy toward the Palestine issue and the future of US-Israeli relations remains uncertain, their effects are likely to be limited. The Trump administration is expected to maintain its current policies of constraining Palestinian resistance, asserting control over the GS, and supporting measures advancing annexation in the WB. At the same time, debate in the US, both within political circles and among the broader public, is intensifying over relations with Israel and the continuation of extensive US support. Consequently, pro-Israel lobbying groups face growing challenges in maintaining their influence in the US political arena.
4. The trajectory of the US-Iran war and continued military escalation across the region. Regional tensions and uncertainty are likely to persist, given the absence of strong indications that the war will be resolved or end in the near term. Continued confrontation would further strain many Arab states through its security and economic repercussions, while diverting their attention from supporting the Palestinian people in confronting Israeli threats.
5. The intensifying rivalry among regional blocs and its potential implications for the Palestinian situation. On 7/8/2026, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan signed a strategic security and defense agreement, known as the Makkah Joint Defense Agreement, aimed at strengthening deterrence and containing regional threats. Meanwhile, a countervailing alliance appears to be taking shape involving Israel, Greece, Cyprus and one Gulf state, with India potentially moving closer to this alignment. Accordingly, competition between the two alliances could have significant implications for the Palestine issue and the broader regional landscape.

Third: Options for Overcoming the Palestinian Impasse

Given the likelihood that many internal and external factors will continue to perpetuate the Palestinian impasse, Palestinian actors face three options for addressing it:

1. Option One: Continued Denial and Unilateralism by the PLO Leadership: Adopting this option would entrench the national impasse, encourage Israel to pursue its expansionist policies and threats, and provide Arab states with a pretext for maintaining a passive approach to the Palestinian situation, citing continued division and the absence of national consensus. It would also prevent the Palestinian people from fully capitalizing on Israel's growing international isolation. Moreover, continued denial and disregard would allow Palestinian actors to prioritize factional interests over broader national interests, undermining the coordination needed to address shared challenges and threats.

More importantly, insisting on holding the legislative elections as scheduled while the impasse remains unacknowledged, national consensus is absent, restrictive political conditions persist, and Palestinians in the diaspora are denied fair and democratic representation through the unilateral selection of their representatives could further deepen the national impasse. Rather than serving as a pathway toward consensus and an initial step toward overcoming the impasse, the elections could instead reinforce it.

2. Option Two: Pursuing Comprehensive National Consensus and Rebuilding the PLO on Democratic and Pluralistic Foundations, with National Coordination Contingent on Achieving These Objectives: For years, Palestinian actors opposed to the PA leadership's approach have pursued this option, while the PA leadership has continued to obstruct the consensus process and monopolize political decision-making and control of national institutions.

Although comprehensive consensus and rebuilding national institutions could offer the most effective path out of the Palestinian impasse and strengthen the internal front against existential threats, the prospects for achieving them have become extremely limited. Under current conditions, therefore, this option appears increasingly unrealistic and unlikely to succeed.

3. Option Three: Freezing Internal Differences, Easing Tension, and Prioritizing Existential Threats: If continuing to ignore the national impasse carries serious consequences, while the prospects for comprehensive national consensus and reconciliation remain limited under current conditions, then freezing differences among Palestinian actors and prioritizing the response to existential threats from Israel may be both necessary and more realistic at this stage. If successful, this approach could help

build trust and eventually pave the way toward comprehensive consensus, ending the Palestinian schism, and putting the Palestinian political house in order once the key actors have the conviction, political will and readiness to overcome the impasse.

Fourth: Recommendations and Proposals

Based on the preceding assessment, this policy paper recommends adopting the third option at this stage, as it represents a realistic and necessary course of action given current priorities and the political environment in Palestine, the region and internationally. Accordingly, it proposes the following recommendations:

1. Set aside current disputes and differences and prioritize the coordination of national efforts to confront the existential threats facing the Palestinian people and the Palestine issue, particularly annexation and displacement, as well as attempts to entrench the Israeli occupation and impose foreign control over the GS. Given the shared existential threat and immediate danger, an effective and coordinated collective response is essential.

2. Move beyond the current rivalry over the future governance of the GS and coordinate Palestinian positions around a unified national vision capable of countering Israeli and US efforts to entrench the occupation and impose external control over the GS.

3. Strengthen the steadfastness of Palestinians in the WB, GS and the 1948 occupied territories, as a central element in confronting existential threats and thwarting plans for annexation, displacement and external control.

4. Consider postponing the elections until the necessary conditions for their success are in place and national consensus is achieved, so that they can serve as a pathway out of the Palestinian impasse rather than further fuel polarization and renewed division. At the same time, elections remain a political and legal entitlement, a popular demand, and an indispensable democratic mechanism for selecting the people's representatives and leaders.

5. If the elections proceed as scheduled in November 2026, the minimum conditions necessary to give them a reasonable chance of success should include removing existing obstacles and repealing the restrictive political conditions introduced through amendments to the electoral law; ensuring that elections are genuine rather than merely formal, particularly in selecting diaspora representatives to the Palestine National Council (PNC); guaranteeing integrity, transparency and freedom of competition; committing in advance to respect the results; and rejecting the exclusion of any political force that meets the requirements of the democratic process.

6. Continue efforts to achieve national consensus and rebuild the PLO on democratic, pluralistic and genuinely representative foundations, while remaining committed to ending the Palestinian schism. This effort should continue despite the failure of previous attempts and the many obstacles to achieving consensus and rebuilding the organization.

7. Continue working toward a unified national vision that is both realistic and ambitious, preserves diversity and pluralism, and takes existing balances of power into account without being constrained by them. At the same time, it should seek to change the status quo through multiple gradual strategies and reconcile political action with comprehensive resistance in all its forms, within a framework of unified national decision-making.

8. Intensify efforts among grassroots leaders, Palestinian intellectuals and the broader Palestinian elite to initiate systematic critical dialogue with Palestinian factions and undertake a comprehensive and objective assessment of the performance of Palestinian elites, factions, popular and community organizations, and trade unions. The aim should be to overcome their limited capacity to influence events and generate meaningful pressure to move beyond the Palestinian impasse.

9. Avoid relying on the outcomes of Israeli and US elections. Instead, focus on strengthening the internal front, overcoming the Palestinian impasse and rebuilding trust among national actors.

10. Coordinate national efforts to capitalize on Israel's growing international isolation and work to broaden and sustain it. At the same time, channel growing global solidarity with the Palestinian people into institutional initiatives, programs and practical measures. Adopt a resistance-oriented program against the Zionist project, understood as a racist, settler-colonial, aggressive and expansionist occupation, while coordinating Palestinian, Arab and international efforts to dismantle it.

11. Strengthen cooperation and coordination among national forces committed to the Palestinian national fundamentals and supportive of comprehensive resistance. This would enhance their ability to exert pressure to curb misguided policies and approaches, safeguard the resistance project through all available forms and means, and help overcome the national impasse by building a unified national bloc, a broad-based front, and a broad pluralistic national movement capable of addressing the challenges ahead and confronting the existential threats facing the Palestine issue.