

Policy Brief

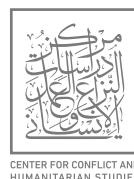
Gaza Today and Beyond Current Priorities and The Future

By Mohammed Alsousi

January 2025

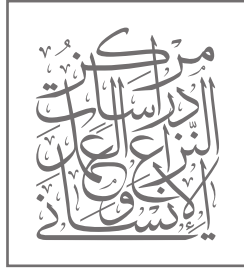


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Current Priorities and The Future

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Based on the CHS workshop held between 21 and 22 October 2024 in Doha, Qatar

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1. Introduction

This policy brief addresses the catastrophic consequences of the ongoing Israeli military assault in Gaza, an escalation rooted not in an isolated conflict between Hamas and Israel, but in the enduring reality of Israeli occupation, systematic blockade, and the continued denial of Palestinian national rights.

Qatar-based Centre for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies (CHS) hosted a workshop in Doha on October 21 and 22, 2024 – the objective to do a deep-dive of Palestinian viewpoints and strategies regarding the future of the Gaza Strip. The key discussions and outcomes are summarised in this policy brief.

The event attracted a diverse group of Palestinian experts including representatives from civil society, United Nations (UN) agencies, international organisations and academic institutions across Europe and the United States. The agenda prompted conversation on the critical priorities for Gaza's recovery and reconstruction; exploring potential outcomes, the complex political circumstances and economic hurdles facing the region post-war. The insights and recommendations from the workshop are earmarked within for key stakeholders including Palestinian

authorities, international organisations as well as CHS.

Over the two days, participants examined the severe impacts of Israeli military action since October 7, 2023 as part of the ongoing and unresolved conflict between the Palestinian people and Israeli occupation, one rooted in decades of systemic blockade, occupation, and denial of rights. The current assault has created a humanitarian catastrophe at an unprecedented level, surpassing the fallout from five previous Israeli military assaults on Gaza between 2008 and 2022. The manner in which Israel prosecuted this war has devastated more than 80% of Gaza's vital infrastructure affecting electricity, healthcare, housing, sanitation, transportation and water. As a result, millions of people are cut off from basic public services. Statistics reveal an alarming 85% unemployment rate with inflation soaring at 27%, exacerbating the poverty levels that predate this conflict. The extent of the destruction has rendered the population reliant on humanitarian aid, exemplifying the urgent need for coordinated efforts to provide both immediate relief and long-term solutions.

1.1 Background

The current military escalation, triggered on October 7, 2023, must be understood within the broader context of the prolonged Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation. While the immediate trigger involved an attack by Hamas, the roots of the crisis lie in decades of siege, systemic occupation, denial of Palestinian sovereignty, and repeated cycles of assaults targeting civilians. The escalation has had a crushing effect on the civilians in Gaza, creating a humanitarian crisis on a staggering level. Tens of thousands of people have lost their lives with many fatalities being civilians.

One year on, the airstrikes continue to rain down on Gaza against a backdrop of ground operations and intensified artillery fire. A significant number of people are now displaced with many finding themselves in overcrowded shelters that lack rudimentary necessities. This situation is putting a strain on essential resources like food, medical care and schools.

The health system, which was already on shaky ground, is now overwhelmed and unable to provide adequate care. Of the 35 hospitals in the Strip, only 17 are partially operational while 18 have been completely shut down. The hospitals which are operational are

inundated with casualties and their medical supplies are running critically low. A lack of fuel for generators and the extensive physical damage to medical facilities makes it hard to care for the injured and sick. On top of this, there's a rising mental health crisis, especially among children. The persistent airstrikes along with the violence, displacement and destruction has fuelled grief beyond compare leaving a population of more than two million traumatised. Estimates suggest that up to 25,000 people may be left with permanent disabilities requiring prosthetic implants; there will be a mental health fallout from this too.

Drinking water is polluted and sanitation systems are in disarray causing serious public health risks and increasing the prevalence of disease. The water systems, which have always suffered from a lack of funding, now produce only 12,000 cubic meters of safe drinking water a day, far below what the population needs.

Over 70% of residential and public buildings have been damaged or destroyed, displacing hundreds of thousands of people. With a colossal 40 million tons of debris, plus 2,240 housing units from past conflicts needing repair, there's a clear and urgent need for temporary housing

solutions and a comprehensive reconstruction plan.

As of now, there's no clear resolution in sight. The international community, including various governments, has called for an end to the violence and for increased access to humanitarian aid, but political and military hurdles complicate those efforts.

2. Potential Scenarios for Post-War Reconstruction

Reconstruction is a complex political challenge. Planning for Gaza's recovery needs to be done before the fighting stops. This means immediately addressing urgent humanitarian needs, clearing away debris and facilitating the return of those displaced. Here follows a number of scenarios envisioned for Gaza, each with unique impacts on how reconstruction could unfold.

Scenario 1: Continued Occupation

If the occupation was to continue, it would generate tighter security restrictions on the movement of goods and people thus making reconstruction impossible. The international focus might remain on short-term fixes instead of driving the fundamental changes required.

Scenario 2: Temporary Occupation of Gaza

In this case, Israel would maintain control over Gaza for up to three years after military activities cease. The territory would be separated into regions like Beit Hanoun, Gaza City, Jabaliya, Netzarim and the Philadelphi Corridor, placing limitations on the Palestinian population to move freely. A one-kilometre area in the eastern strip would be off-limits and movement would be restricted for those in the northern areas up to Al-Mashtal. The appointment of an Israeli governor for humanitarian issues in Gaza raises probing questions. Currently, two official Palestinian bodies are involved in reconstruction: the Ministry of Relief and Early Recovery which will handle humanitarian concerns for six months to three years after the conflict. And a Ministerial Reconstruction Committee led by the Minister of Planning, including members from five ministries and private sectors. This situation also calls for coordination among all parties on the ground to ensure a swift response to immediate needs. However, there's doubt whether Palestinian authorities will be open to collaborating with Israel especially under the strain of the pressing humanitarian challenges.

Scenario 3: Transitional International Administration

Here, an international agency steps in to oversee the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip to ensure basic needs are met, security is maintained and sustainable development projects are launched. For this model to thrive, it will be contingent on sizeable international support with participation from Palestinians in both official and civil society remits. This framework could facilitate constructive rebuilding efforts, but it demands strong international consensus and engagement from Palestinian groups.

Scenario 4: National Infrastructure Development under the Palestinian Authority

The most hopeful outlook envisages a unified Palestine which overcomes internal divides and diminishes the far-right factions influencing Israeli decisions. In this case, a Palestinian reconstruction organisation would work hand-in-hand with international donors under the State of Palestine. This model aims for a self-sufficient Palestinian economy, highlighting local governance, autonomy and lasting economic stability.

2.1. International Positions

a) The U.S. Position

The U.S. remains firmly committed to Israel's security often pairing this support with surface-level concerns about humanitarian issues like water scarcity. However, these concerns do not oppose Israeli policies especially with US elections looming. American think tanks frequently place Israel's security narrative in the spotlight and amplify this by portraying Gaza as lacking progressive governance, institutional frameworks and civil society. This view disregards the historical injustices faced by Palestinians by framing the situation as a purely humanitarian issue, thereby dismissing it as a political one. For Israel's right-wing government, this representation suits their agenda as it depicts Palestinian self-governance as a threat. This pushes for complete domination over Palestinian areas while eroding their political structures, keeping them in a state of subjugation.

There are other proposals that aim to merge Gaza with Egypt through economic initiatives or even depopulating the Gaza Strip and in doing so, reduce the Palestinian cause to a refugee matter. These issues extend beyond Gaza as the continued expansion of settlements in the West Bank further jeopardises the viability

of a two-state solution, making that reality a remote one.

b) The Arab and Islamic Position

With deep divisions amongst Arab States, the Islamic world has struggled to inflict any pressure on Israel or the US. The Abraham Accords – a normalisation of relations between some Arab nations and Israel – has fragmented the Arab bloc. The Arab League has been largely ineffective and many Arab countries are preoccupied with domestic issues and political ties to Islamist movements. As a result, the Palestinian cause is often relegated to a secondary concern. Support tends to be limited to humanitarian aid rather than addressing crucial political issues. Palestinian interests, therefore, remain sidelined without any substantial political progress or support.

c) The European Position

There is also a marked divide in Europe over the Palestinian issue. Some countries have recognised Palestinian statehood, but others, especially those with strong connections to Israel, prioritise Israeli security. Following the events of October 7, some Europeans have equated the rhetoric of Palestinian self-defence with a renewed sense of historical Jewish victimhood. For instance, Germany continues to back Israel, driven by a

sense of historical obligation which leaves little room for a pro-Palestinian stance among European nations.

d) The “Tufan al-Aqsa” and Its Implications

Tufan al-Aqsa must be contextualised not as an isolated military confrontation, but as a manifestation of longstanding Palestinian resistance to occupation and systemic violations. The escalation shattered the international complacency around the status quo of blockade and dehumanisation in Gaza. The “Tufan al-Aqsa” marks a crucial moment in that it is not just a passing event. It has thrust the Palestinian issue back into the spotlight of international dialogue. This brings both opportunities and challenges that could reshape the narrative of Gaza’s future. These opportunities need to be harnessed to promote Palestinian rights and address the rising threats of division and security-focused attitude.

2.2. Challenges in Post-War Reconstruction

a) Occupation Constraints and Political Division

The blockade by Israel and the internal division among Palestinians creates significant hurdles for reconstruction planning and collaboration. Israel imposes strict limitations on essential materials for rebuilding, thwarting

critical projects and hindering overall progress. Additionally, the political rift within Palestine complicates the coordination of humanitarian aid and the management of resources.

Israel's control and oversight heavily inhibit any reconstruction activities in Gaza. The Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) grants Israel crucial intelligence as all data regarding rebuilt residential units – since 2014 – is sent to Israeli authorities. Israel dictates power over suppliers and investors. This is a bone of contention for the United Nations, but Israel claims that Palestinian consent to share the data overrides the United Nations objection.

Looking ahead, USAID (United States Agency for International Development) has signalled a return to the previous mechanism unless a better alternative is presented. The Palestinian Authority (PA) has, however, been advised to steer clear of the old framework and urged to advocate for a new system that facilitates the swift entry of resources. Current assessments indicate it could take up to 15 years to rebuild Gaza under the GRM, thus this approach is discouraged. Moreover, reconstruction plans need to tackle land ownership issues including properties overseen by UNRWA

(United Nations Relief and Works Agency).

b) Regional and International Pressures

International shifts have impacted aid flows and political dynamics forcing a rethink on alliances and strategies. Those caught in the current crisis struggle to foresee “the day after” as they lack the necessary tools to confront or engage with global agreements. There is a tendency within the region to overlook a political solution to the Palestinian issue in favour of a humanitarian approach instead – an attitude that is amplified by this ongoing disaster. Israel is intent on normalising the pre-7 October status of Gaza which it perceives as the best outcome for Palestinians. It should be acknowledged that the displacement of Gazans relies on the outcomes of international and regional players.

c) Funding

Funding channels should migrate away from stringent conditions or constraints. Financial inflows should follow a phased approach; the focus on immediate recovery first and long-term reconstruction to follow. This framework will engender effective responses from donors, ensuring resources are provided as and when needed.

The Palestinian Authority's financial shortfall forces its reliance on external aid for reconstruction. Damage estimates have soared to around \$100 billion across multiple sectors: \$9 billion for social services, \$20 billion for infrastructure, \$5 billion for the economy and around \$2 billion for governance. This is in addition to the rebuilding of homes for 250,000 to 300,000 families. Continuous injections of funding from international actors is pivotal for economic recovery.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is on the ground in Gaza, alongside other humanitarian agencies, delivering immediate assistance by leveraging expertise in crisis response. Early efforts have focused on increasing access to clean water, creating emergency work in essential sectors, providing medical supplies, managing waste and clearing debris. As the war drags on and the needs mount up, the UNDP is stepping up its efforts to support civil society organisations and small to medium-sized businesses. It is also providing dignified temporary shelter and expanding its efforts in emergency employment and waste management service whilst facilitating the safe transportation of humanitarian aid.

2.3. Opportunities in Post-War Reconstruction

a) International and Regional Support: Arab and Islamic Partnerships in Reconstruction

Strategic partnerships with Arab and Islamic nations open up avenues for funding and executing post-war reconstruction projects. These partnerships foster a stable economic climate and reduce reliance on emergency aid, paving the way for long-term sustainable development. Furthermore, they build resilience and encourage regional cooperation in the recovery efforts.

b) Technological and Sustainable Innovations

1. Data Collection and Digital Transformation

Reconstruction efforts must adopt a smart approach by applying systematic data collection methods and incorporating digital solutions.

2. Sustainability and Resilience Framework

The blueprint for reconstruction needs to prioritise sustainability and resilience, leveraging digital technologies like AI to tackle both local issues and broader challenges such as climate change and refugee displacement.

3. Comprehensive Damage Assessment

To kick-start reconstruction, an accurate assessment of the damage across all sectors is a pre-requisite. This calls for constructive dialogue between Palestinian authorities and international donors, backed by cutting-edge geographic information systems (GIS) to boost assessment accuracy.

4. Recycling and Debris Removal

Swiftly clearing away debris and recycling materials is essential. Advanced tools like satellite imagery could be used alongside skilled field teams to minimise dependence on engineers and ensure more accurate estimates of damage.

5. Public-Private Sector Balance

The reconstruction framework should balance public sector planning with private sector implementation. The public sector will carry out the planning while the private sector will take responsibility for implementing the projects. Past efforts relied on the British mandate-era planning models which require a refresh. The plan must incorporate modern urban development principles to reflect Gaza's recent horizontal and vertical expansion.

6. Utilising Underground Infrastructure

Tapping into underground resources, like utility tunnels, can significantly boost Gaza's capacity for expansion and development.

7. Learning from Global Examples

Valuable insights from progressive economies such as China with its modular construction techniques and Europe's strategies for recycling post-war rubble – such as the practices in the Russia-Ukraine conflict where 60-70% of rubble can be recycled for use – in areas that do not require foundation work.

c) Building Local Capacity and Human Resources Investment

1. Investing in local talent for reconstruction projects and providing training in effective project management will promote sustainable growth, create lasting jobs and build self-reliance.
2. Blending scientific methods with social technologies is crucial to meet the pressing needs of the population today.
3. Vocational and technical education programmes are essential for preparing the local workforce to tackle post-war labour market challenges, especially given the devastation of the private sector

and loss of income sources. Supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is also key to economic revival.

d) Role of the Palestinian Diaspora

Involving the Palestinian diaspora in the reconstruction effort is vital. Their considerable resources and networks can offer crucial support. The links between the diaspora and grassroots communities in Palestine are essential during this recovery phase.

e) Strengthening Local Organisations

There should be a marked focus on boosting local organisations so they can effectively deliver social and healthcare services. These groups are vital for revitalising civil society and rebuilding Palestinian institutions which are crucial for fostering development, especially after the destruction of essential sectors like education, health and professional services.

3. Key Recommendations

a) Humanitarian Aid and Immediate Needs

Humanitarian interventions, though critical, must not depoliticise the context nor substitute for justice, accountability, and the enforcement of international law. It is recommended at least 2,000 trucks loaded with crucial supplies – such as food, medicines, shelter materials and water – should enter Gaza daily. This emergency intervention should also prioritise vulnerable groups including children, the elderly and women through the provision of hygiene products and nutritional aid. To mitigate aid diversion and the misuse of aid and to ensure fairness in distribution, robust monitoring mechanisms must be established to guarantee assistance reaches those who need it most.

b) Infrastructure Rehabilitation

There should be an instant and substantial international response to rebuild health facilities and address pressing needs. Recovery efforts should focus on restoring critical services like water, sanitation, electricity and healthcare whilst laying the foundations for sustainable development. Immediate actions should include setting up field hospitals, deploying mobile clinics and providing emergency shelters; the latter can be in the form of temporary accommodation such as tents or caravans while longer-term rebuilding efforts take shape.

Additionally, clearing debris – potentially through a cash-for-work programme – and rehabilitating energy grids are vital to ensure a steady electricity supply. Reconstruction policies should follow a “Build Back Better” approach, ensuring that new housing meets international aid standards and reflects the needs of families affected by the crisis.

Urgent restoration of the electrical infrastructure is a must to ensure a reliable service to the community, medical facilities and schools and to mitigate the ongoing blackouts.

c) Psychosocial Support

There is a pressing need for psychological support to address the severe mental health challenges in Gaza especially in children, women and individuals with disabilities, many of whom experienced trauma during the conflict. Strong psychosocial rehabilitation programmes, whether one-on-one or community-based, are warranted to support those who are most affected particularly in the hardest-hit areas. Restoring educational services is also critical as it will enhance psychosocial support for children and aid in the recovery of the Gaza Strip as a whole, ensuring that an entire generation doesn't miss out on learning. Support programmes need to be facilitated for 600,000 students who currently cannot access education. This will help mitigate the long-term psychological and social fallout from the conflict.

d) Sustainable Development and Economic Revitalisation

Revitalising Gaza's economy calls for significant international investment and better local coordination to rebuild its devastated agricultural and industrial sectors. Damaged factories need to be reopened to create job opportunities and economic partnerships with Arab nations heightened to attract investment and boost local markets. The goal is to stimulate growth and restore financial stability as GDP has dropped by 34% in the West Bank and 24% in Gaza.

It is important to establish clear legal frameworks and protections for Palestinian goods to ensure fair competition against Israeli and foreign imports. Moreover, urban planning should prioritise sustainability and renewable energy, ensuring public facilities meet environmental standards. Long-term development plans must build infrastructure that can withstand crises while emphasising eco-friendly projects, water recycling and energy independence to lessen Gaza's reliance on external resources.

e) Political Leadership and Strategic Planning

The current crisis is unlike anything seen before, with the suffering – especially among women and girls – reaching alarming peaks. There is, therefore, a need for coordinated effort to tackle the challenges and create a solid framework for early recovery and community rebuilding. This strategy must prioritise territorial integrity, Palestinian governance and local ownership of reconstruction efforts.

Furthermore there is a necessity for a unified political leadership to steer reconstruction efforts beyond just fixing the infrastructure. It is essential to address humanitarian needs and promote social cohesion; both are key elements for lasting stability. Whilst achieving political unity within the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) or the Palestinian Authority is hindered, the recognition of the State of Palestine by many countries presents a crucial opportunity to build a legitimate platform for Palestinian unity and governance.

Additionally, a unified Palestinian civil forum or observatory to supervise and engage with the reconstruction process should be set-up. This body would ensure transparency, accountability and internal oversight, playing a critical role in spotting failures or misconduct during the reconstruction process and addressing Israeli actions that hinder these efforts. It's also vital to advocate for a comprehensive Palestinian reconstruction strategy that includes transparent governance mechanisms to effectively manage international aid.

Lastly, integrating gender considerations into future plans will be essential to foster justice and equality while working toward the ultimate goals of stability and development in Gaza.

f) Addressing Security Challenges and Israeli Plans

Israel views its military actions in Gaza as existential threats. This perspective resonates with a broader agreement that backs the Israeli displacement of Palestinians as outlined in the Israeli "Generals' Plan" crafted in September 2024. This plan suggests that a blockade is the best solution to the conflict, aiming to control northern Gaza by moving its residents south and establishing a comprehensive siege that turns the north into a "closed military zone." It includes measures to restrict access to essential resources like food, water and fuel thereby using starvation to push for migration.

For Israel, the "day after" is not just a distant idea; it's shaped by what's happening right now. Understanding the internal divisions within Israel is key to grasping the wide range of opinions. Some Israeli's support the expansion of settlements while others advocate for working with the Palestinian Authority or dismantling Gaza's current governance. This awareness is critical for the planning efforts post-conflict. For reconstruction efforts to succeed, political cooperation among international and regional players is a must along as is dialogue with Israeli authorities. Security

is essential for successfully implementing and maintaining these reconstruction initiatives. There is global consensus that political progress is vital to end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.

g) Focusing on the National Agenda

There is a need to uphold the core values of liberation and resistance within the Palestinian cause and not allow these to be reduced to small, localised agreements. There is advocacy to prioritise the national agenda and grassroots movements as the main drivers of reconstruction. Conversations need to weave Palestinian strategies into broader regional and international discussions on Gaza. Innovative, pragmatic solutions are crucial for building stability and facilitating the rebuilding process. Ultimately, the importance of acknowledging Gaza as a vital part of the Palestinian identity is recognised, emphasising the connection among all Palestinian territories including the West Bank and Jerusalem.

h) The Role of Palestinian Identity in the “Day After”

Israeli actions that aim to undermine Palestinian national identity need to be countered by maintaining a strong political and national framework. There are intentional efforts to stifle Palestinian aspirations and the education system needs to be overhauled to address modern societal challenges. This reframing should include creating curricula that bolster Palestinian identity, boost community resilience and promote national unity – key factors for societal stability and rebuilding trust among different groups. Offering scholarships for students affected by the conflict is also a good approach. Initiatives are required to establish effective governance by the State of Palestine in Gaza while ensuring that redefining the Palestinian national project doesn’t sacrifice the collective right to self-determination for individual social rights. Additionally, the importance of revitalising civil society and grassroots movements is acknowledged as is UNRWA’s crucial role in addressing the refugee situation and protecting their right to return.

i) Unifying International and Regional Efforts to Support Reconstruction

To effectively support Gaza’s reconstruction, there is a need to unify international and regional efforts across key areas like education, healthcare and infrastructure. It’s crucial to confront the current challenges especially the restrictions from Israel on the entry of essential rebuilding materials. There cannot be a reliance on the old Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM); it cannot compete on the scale of the

ongoing crisis. This war demands fresh strategies that differ from those used after previous conflicts. The previous “Self-Help Approach” which allowed families to get professional assistance to rebuild their homes won’t work this time due to the extensive destruction. Past efforts relied on two methods: an area-based approach and emergency shelters. These need a complete rethink to meet the specific challenges that await. A coordinated effort among key stakeholders to assess the war’s impacts means immediate needs can be prioritised whilst keeping an eye on future goals like security, social harmony, governance and reconstruction.

Furthermore, international advocacy, especially from UN agencies, must ramp up. There should be a loud call to end the war and inform the global community about its dire long-term consequences. Yet, despite these urgent appeals, real pressure on Israel from the international community is still amiss.

j) Analysing the Gaps Between Aspirations and Reality

There is a significant gap between the ambitious goals set for the reconstruction process and the tough political realities that present today. There is caution against being overly optimistic in this early recovery phase as there is a crucial shortage of leadership capacity and skilled workers to tackle the extensive damage. To address this, production systems require comprehensive rehabilitation and the workforce mobilised.

Additionally, it’s essential to develop clear strategies to identify lost expertise, evaluate current skills and encourage professionals to return to Gaza to contribute to the rebuilding efforts.

4. Postscript: One Year On (2025 Update)

a) Humanitarian Catastrophe Deepens

As of January 2025, Gaza faces near-total institutional collapse: only a few hospitals partially functioning, famine warnings issued, and over 1.5 million people internally displaced in uninhabitable conditions. Multiple UN agencies have described the situation as “beyond humanitarian response” due to continued restrictions on aid delivery and targeting of relief infrastructure.

b) Collapse of UNRWA Services

The suspension or termination of funding to UNRWA in early 2025, by major donors including the US and several European states, has triggered a governance and service vacuum, especially for refugee support, education, and health.

c) Regional Shifts and Normalisation

Ongoing normalisation efforts between Israel and Arab states have continued despite the Gaza crisis, revealing a widening disconnect between diplomatic agendas and Palestinian realities. Egypt's border policy remains deeply restrictive, and efforts to offload Gaza's displacement burden have sparked international criticism.

d) International Inaction and Fragmented Pressure

Despite overwhelming evidence of mass civilian casualties and war crimes, no meaningful international pressure has stopped Israel's military campaign. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) and International Criminal Court (ICC) have seen increased filings, but enforcement remains limited.

e) Reconstruction Blocked

Almost no reconstruction has occurred due to ongoing bombardment, border restrictions, and the lack of a functioning coordination mechanism. Proposals for reconstruction under a transitional or international administration have stalled, and there is no consensus on who should lead post-conflict recovery.

f) Political Vacuum

Fragmentation within Palestinian leadership continues, with no unified national strategy for Gaza's political future. Civil society organisations, though battered, have taken on critical roles in service provision, protection, and advocacy.



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Cover image: Gaza Rubble

Photo credit: Omar El Qattaa/Anadolu via Getty Images