



## ISSUE BRIEF

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### WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR PALESTINE?

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*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do  
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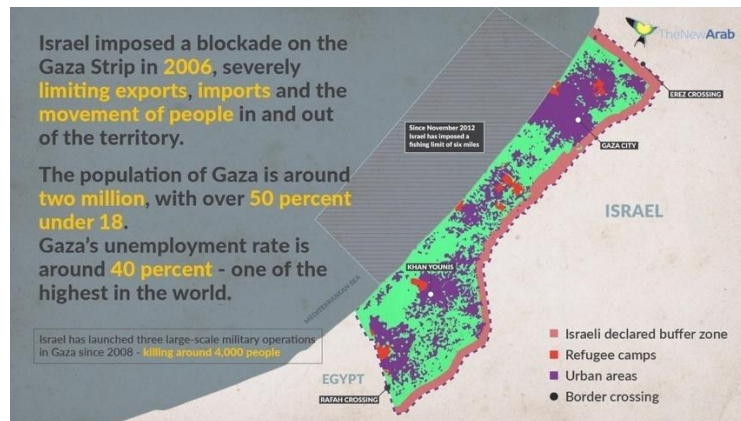


**The Palestinian struggle has long been an accepted motto in Arab/Muslim narrations and continues to be used to this day to mobilize the populace. However, given the changing Middle East landscape, the power and ability to influence of this slogan is increasingly diminishing towards complete extinction.**

For the Palestinians, their trials and tribulations have only intensified. Even today, Israel continues to bomb the Gaza Strip on an almost daily basis. Israeli settlement expansion continues unabated. In the past month alone, there have been plans to add 6205 settlement units on Palestinian land.<sup>1</sup> According to the World Bank, the Palestinian economy is estimated to shrink by almost 8 percent this year as it struggles in the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic. Unemployment in the West Bank and Gaza is at 18.2% and 48.5% respectively.<sup>2</sup>

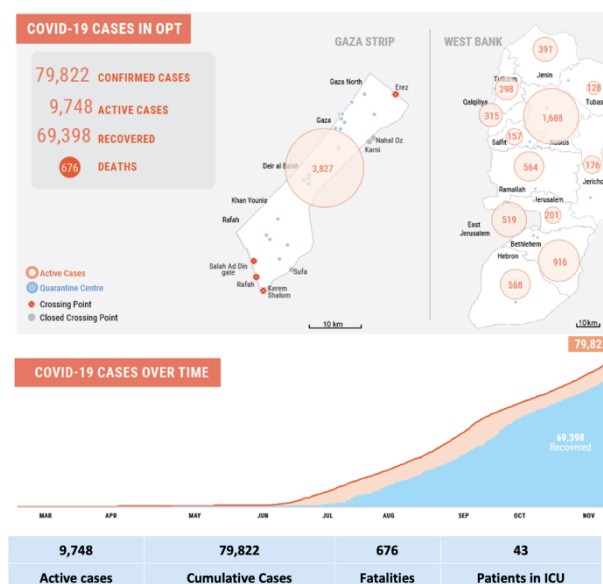
<sup>1</sup> "What Biden Can Do About the Israeli-Palestinian Mess He'll Inherit," *The Nation*, November 23, 2020. <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/biden-trump-israel-palestine/tncamp/>

<sup>2</sup> "World Bank: Palestinian economy to contract 8% in 2020," *Independent*, November 25, 2020. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world-bank-palestinian-economy-to-contract-8-in-2020-economy-world-bank-palestinian-israel-economy-b1761214.html>



**Source:** *The New Arab*<sup>3</sup>

The coronavirus pandemic is spreading at an exponential rate in Gaza, which has been described by many as the world's largest open-air prison as well as one of the most overcrowded areas on the planet. Complications arising from lack of Covid-19 testing kits and personal protective equipment (PPE) are being further compounded by Israeli imposed blockades on medical supplies reaching Gaza. Health officials have forewarned that since Covid cases in Gaza have reached calamitous stages, it is only a matter of time before the Palestinian enclave medical system completely collapses.<sup>4</sup>



**Source:** United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> “Israeli defence minister says 'ready to talk to Hamas,” *The New Arab*, November 24, 2020. <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2020/11/24/israeli-defence-minister-says-ready-to-talk-to-hamas>

4 “Gaza declares COVID-19 disaster with health system near collapse,” *Al Jazeera*, November 23, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/23/gaza-declares-covid-19-disaster-with-health-system-near-collapse>

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. [https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/sitrep\\_21\\_covid\\_19.pdf](https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/sitrep_21_covid_19.pdf)

There is however a thin ray of light for the Palestinian populace. On September 24, an agreement was reached between the two Palestinian factions: Hamas and Fatah, where the two sides agreed to hold the first elections in nearly 15 years. Most recently, on November 17, the two sides met in Cairo to discuss implementation of reconciliation towards elections. Elections have not been held in Palestine since 2006.

### **Palestine During the Trump Era**

There is no doubt that the Trump administration has profoundly changed the political panorama for the Palestinian issue. While over the years, the United States has always supported Israel - paying mere lip service to the two-state solution, while giving Israel free reins to do as they pleased – the Trump government did not hesitate to set the bar high in terms of crushing what little hope the Palestinians had.

After giving false hopes to the Palestinians in the form of an ultimate deal which would resolve the conflict, President Trump proceeded to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and even moved the US Embassy there from Tel Aviv, thus cementing his campaign promises of giving great importance to the evangelical Christians as well as the Jewish lobby in the US. Concurrently, he refused to denounce the illegal Israeli settlement expansion and instead in the face of Palestinian outcry, withdrew funding to the United Nations Relief & Works Agency (UNRWA) on which millions of Palestinians depend on for sustenance. His Middle East plan recognized Israeli sovereignty over Israeli expansion over settlement blocs in the occupied West Bank. According to the new map, Palestine would consist of boroughs of fragmented land and capital in occupied East Jerusalem.



*Source: The White House*<sup>6</sup>

During his final year, he also mediated Israeli rapprochement with three Arab states (UAE, Bahrain and Sudan) in exchange for suspending annexation. Annexation is however continuing to this day and the Palestinian cause is more isolated than ever.

### What Does the Future Hold For Palestine Under Biden?

The results of the US 2020 elections have been taken by many as a precursor of some breathing space to the Palestinians after four years of unrelenting assault on their rights and aspirations. Already, it can be seen that in the period before Joe Biden takes office, the Palestinian Authority (PA) is making moves such as re-establishing security ties with Israel and sending Palestinian officials back to Bahrain and the UAE, despite their official recognition of the state of Israel. All these steps are an effort to return to the status quo. Of course, given the devastating situation in Gaza, this also is an opportune time for the PA to collect the \$890 million in tax transfers, Israel has been withholding due to severing of ties in May.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Peace-to-Prosperity-0120.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> "Palestinian Authority resuming cooperation with Israel, Palestinian official says," *Reuters*, November 17, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-palestinians-idUSKBN27X2D1>

While Biden is a strong advocate of the two-state solution, he has always rebuffed calls for leveraging US aid to Israel in order to pressure the latter, stating that the idea of cutting of aid to the US 'only true ally in the region' was absolutely unthinkable.<sup>8</sup> Though he initially opposed the shifting of the US embassy, he has clearly said his administration will not reverse this decision and will instead reopen the US consulate in East Jerusalem in order to serve the Palestinians.<sup>9</sup> He has also enunciated on several occasions that under his supervision, the US will renew all ties with the PA and reverse the cancellation of support to Palestinian sustenance programs be it for economic development or humanitarian assistance.<sup>10</sup> However, these are also conditioned only if the PA stops welfare payments to the families of Palestinian prisoners and terrorists who have been slain by Israeli forces.

On the subject of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, the new US President is a unwavering adversary and has clearly depicted that he believes this lobby is "wrong".<sup>11</sup> With reference to the UAE, Bahrain and Sudan rapprochement with Israel, Biden has encouraged it and urged other Arab states to engage in bolder steps toward normalization with Israel.<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusion

All thing considered, there will be a radical departure from unconditional, open advocacy for Israel towards some consideration of Palestinian rights in terms of tone and diplomatic approach. However, it is also very clear that President Trump's policies of appeasement of the Israeli far right will not vanish with a new US administration. Now more than ever, Palestinians need to present a united stand and thus create a political strategy which goes beyond dependence on an American policy towards a Palestinian solution and can counter Israeli disregard for any semblance of peace or adherence to international law.

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<sup>8</sup> "Biden says he opposes Israel annexing territory," *The Hill*, May 19, 2020, <https://thehill.com/policy/international/498597-biden-says-he-opposes-israel-annexing-territory>

<sup>9</sup> "If elected, Biden to restore Palestinian aid, reopen PLO office in Washington: Harris," *Al Arabiya*, November 3, 2020, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2020/11/03/If-elected-Biden-to-restore-Palestinian-aid-reopen-PLO-office-in-Washington-Harris>

<sup>10</sup> "Joe Biden 'no saviour' of the Palestinians," *Al Jazeera*, November 8, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/8/joe-biden-no-savior-to-the-palestinians>

<sup>11</sup> "Biden will oppose 'singling out' Israel at UN, campaign tells Arab activists," *Middle East Eye*, July 10, 2020. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/biden-will-oppose-singling-out-israel-un-campaign-tells-arab-activists>

<sup>12</sup> "The Next US President: Joe Biden," *Dawn*, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1586453>