



Political Reconstruction: For Gaza and Collective Survival

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Introduction

After more than a year and a half of Israel's genocidal assault—marked by mass killings, devastation, and profound loss—even speaking of Gaza's future, let alone its reconstruction, feels impossible. Indeed, the rebuilding of Gaza feels increasingly out of reach amid stalled negotiations, the collapse of the [ceasefire agreement](#), and the relentless bombardment of people and place. Yet in the face of genocide and the looming threat of forced displacement, which the US administration is audaciously promoting as a *fait accompli*, there is an urgent need to cultivate a critical Palestinian political voice to reclaim Gaza's future. Non-Palestinian voices—whether Israeli, regional, or international—are growing louder in their efforts to impose their vision of Gaza's "day after," one that effectively erases Palestinians from the equation.¹

At this critical juncture, it is essential to center a Palestinian vision for the future that is grounded in both Palestinian unity and the right to self-determination. While many discussions on the future have focused on physical rebuilding, fewer address the issue of political reconstruction. In this commentary, Al-Shabaka analysts Talal Abu Rokbeh, Mohammed Al-Hafi, and Alaa Tartir explore the disunity that has plagued the Palestinian political system and the disintegration of the national movement. They argue that political unity is a necessary foundation



for collective survival and national liberation.

This commentary builds on a broader conversation held in November 2024 as part of our Policy Lab program. The full discussion is available to view in Arabic [here](#).

Disunity: Outcome of Failure, Instrument of Control

The genocidal assault on Gaza has laid bare the devastating consequences of the Palestinian leadership's failure to articulate a collective, forward-looking political vision. It has not only failed to undertake any meaningful collective action to protect Palestinians but has also been unable to offer a unified roadmap or vision for Gaza's "day after." While Palestinian political factions have issued [statements](#) condemning the genocide and calling for resistance or solidarity, these responses have been fragmented and often contradictory, [lacking a shared strategy](#) or unified front. As a result, they have been insufficient and incommensurate with the gravity of the genocide, having failed to stop the atrocities or [offer a coordinated national vision](#) capable of challenging the status quo. For those in Gaza facing relentless bombardment from a genocidal regime, survival understandably takes precedence over political engagement. It is entirely reasonable for them to expect a bold and unified response from the Palestinian body politic—one that matches the scale of their enduring sacrifices.

Yet this critical juncture in Palestinian existence has exposed the magnitude of political fragmentation, the [persistent crisis of representative leadership](#), and the structural weaknesses of national institutions. Moreover, the Palestinian political regime's dependence on regional and international actors has revealed its inability to forge an independent path toward self-determination. While Palestinians must grapple with their internal political disunity, it is equally essential to recognize that their fragmentation is not incidental but a deliberate mechanism of control imposed by the Israeli regime—fragmentation by colonial design.



The Israeli regime's policies do not just exploit Palestinian fragmentation—they produce and maintain it as a strategic mechanism of control. The Israeli regime has obstructed Palestinian efforts at national unity by making unified political organizing extremely difficult, through [territorial fragmentation](#) among other methods. It has undermined national institutions, such as the Palestine Liberation Organization, which could serve [as the unified leadership umbrella for all Palestinians](#). It has [cracked down](#) on Palestinian political and civil society organizations and imposed restrictions on prominent political figures, limiting participation and leadership renewal. This repressive environment has stifled unity and deepened political fragmentation.

Failure to Heed the Unity Call

Yet, despite the Israeli regime's relentless efforts to divide the Palestinian people, there have been meaningful grassroots attempts at forging a path towards national unity. During the 2011 Arab uprisings, Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza mobilized in thousands, demanding national unity. The youth-led protests called on Hamas and Fatah to [end their division](#) and political feud. In response to pressure from the demonstrations on March 15, 2011, Fatah and Hamas signed a [reconciliation agreement](#) in Cairo two months later, though it was [never implemented](#). A decade after the 2011 protests for national unity, the 2021 uprising [revived](#) similar demands, but with a renewed focus on [unifying the Palestinian people](#) themselves rather than reconciling political factions. It garnered even broader participation across all parts of colonized Palestine.

The 2021 uprising erupted in response to the [dispossession](#) of Palestinian families from the Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, as well as the Israeli encroachments on the Al-Aqsa compound, and renewed assaults on Gaza. Widely dubbed as the "[Unity Intifada](#)," the uprising saw grassroots groups across colonized Palestine organize demonstrations and acts of resistance. Among the



most significant was the [general strike on May 18](#), which powerfully unified Palestinians across geographic and political divides. Their slogan, “Liberation is Within Our Reach,” called for a decisive break from the Oslo-defined notion of statehood and the political system it produced. Through the uprising’s [“Manifesto of Dignity and Hope,”](#) organizers called for the reunification of the Palestinian people and for overcoming internal divisions and geographic fragmentation.

The Israeli regime ultimately crushed the 2021 uprising through brute force and mass arrests. At the same time, the Palestinian Authority (PA) [did not support](#) the Unity Intifada and participated in its suppression through ongoing security coordination with the Israeli authorities. Many Palestinians regard the PA’s killing of civil society figure Nizar Banat as the [pivotal event](#) that signaled the beginning of the uprising’s end.

Had the Palestinian national movement embraced the Unity Intifada and the 2011 protests for what they were—a popular cry for unity—it might have avoided the current state of political divide. Instead, the post-Oslo leadership persisted in a fragmented and zero-sum mindset, disregarding popular demands for a political system that encompassed the full spectrum of partisan and grassroots representation. They favored authoritarian rule over genuine unity, a political inclination made glaringly apparent in [their response](#) to Israel’s ongoing genocidal war on Gaza.

Following the October 7 operation and the start of Israel’s genocidal assault, authorities in the West Bank and Gaza delayed coordinated action for over five months, only [convening](#) in Moscow in March 2024 at Russia’s invitation. They later met in Beijing to formulate yet another [reconciliation agreement](#)—the 13th between Fatah and Hamas. The latter meeting included the participation of 14 other Palestinian political factions. Although the Beijing Declaration was theoretically promising, it [lacked](#) binding implementation mechanisms and a



clear timeline. It therefore remained stalled as neither Fatah nor Hamas could agree on core issues, including resistance strategies, principles of representation, the role of armed factions, and models of governance. As a result, the factions not only failed to implement the agreement but also actively [obstructed](#) its progress, driven by entrenched divisions and political self-interest with blatant disregard for the urgency of the ongoing genocide. This reflects the broader failure of the Palestinian political body as a whole to take meaningful political action proportionate to the scale of the current existential challenges. At this moment of unprecedented peril, the need for political renewal has become a matter of collective survival—one that those in power remain unwilling to face.

Political Unity as a Matter of Survival

Although numerous [post-war scenarios](#) have been proposed, few have meaningfully addressed the urgent necessity of Palestinian political reconstruction and the reestablishment of national unity. These proposals have included the [re-establishment](#) of direct Israeli military rule in Gaza; the [creation](#) of a local administration composed of vetted local figures under Israeli military or administrative oversight; an [external](#), regional, or international administration of Gaza; the [continuation](#) of Hamas governance, either independently or in coalition with other Palestinian factions; a PA [takeover](#); or the formation of a national rescue or reconciliation government based on a broad national agreement, such as that [envisioned](#) in the Beijing Declaration. Most of these proposals were drafted without involving Palestinians. It is thus no surprise that there is a lack of discussion on the need for rebuilding Palestinian political agency.

Regardless of which scenario shapes the next phase, an inclusive national dialogue that surpasses the current impasse and engages the broader Palestinian civil society remains the essential first step toward political reconstruction.



Crucially, such a dialogue must not repeat the failures of past efforts. Both Fatah and Hamas have engaged in [multiple reconciliation dialogues](#) since the onset of the intra-Palestinian divide in 2007, all of which have collapsed. These efforts have proven futile due to the absence of enforceable shared governance arrangements, and also because both factions continue to prioritize narrow factional interests over national needs and refuse to critically examine the foundations of the existing political system. In the absence of any accountability mechanism, the Palestinian people remain trapped in a cycle of political stagnation and fragmentation with little recourse to carve a path toward a renewed and representative future.

From Collapse to Collective Leadership

Over the years, the main forces sustaining Palestinian fragmentation have worked to reinforce a crumbling political system that has lost both the capacity and the legitimacy to lead the Palestinian people in their pursuit of rights and national demands. To move beyond the current state of political fragmentation and stagnation, the wider Palestinian political community and emerging forces within civil society must urgently commit to the following pillars of rebuilding a unified national movement:

- Establish effective accountability mechanisms and a forward-looking strategy to [rebuild the national movement](#) that advances beyond ineffective power-sharing deals and lays the foundation for a new system of governance.
- Reject the [personalization of power](#)—i.e, move away from a system of leadership centered around a single individual, as seen with Arafatism, Fayyadism, and Abbasism. Instead, [empower Palestinian civil](#) society organizations to participate meaningfully in the national decision-making process.



- Envision a [collective leadership](#) capable of advancing a representative and unified Palestinian strategy for liberation.
- Prioritize the needs and aspirations of the Palestinian people over the demands of external actors or the occupying power.
- Build effective state structures, reform national institutions, and [reconstruct the security sector](#) in alignment with the overarching demand for freedom.
- Recognize that the demand for freedom cannot be realized without directly confronting the realities of colonization. This must be an integral part of a larger, strategic movement for liberation.

These pillars are the urgent foundation for rebuilding a political project capable of resisting fragmentation and averting the looming threat of national erasure. Indeed, the current juncture offers a rare political opening, forged through immense cost and irreparable loss. Palestinians, especially those responsible for political decision-making and advocacy, must not squander this opportunity. They must seize this moment to initiate meaningful political reconstruction and articulate a national vision and leadership capable of resisting the ongoing threat to Palestinian national existence. This political vision must transform the current reality of “separated fronts”—a division deliberately created and entrenched by the occupying regime to sustain Palestinian fragmentation and weakness—into a unified front that brings together all Palestinians and restores their collective national identity and sense of unity.

The Palestinian national repertoire is rich with moments of collective struggle and resilience to draw upon. The 2021 Unity Intifada stands as a compelling and inspiring demonstration of confronting political fragmentation. It left behind a deeply valuable legacy as a model of unity and defiance, but the Palestinian



political leadership and institutions failed to translate that potential into meaningful change. Realizing the potential of this collective legacy of unity and resistance demands responsible political action and genuine reform of the Palestinian political system. This includes ending the monopoly on decision-making, rejecting submission to international dictates, redefining the political and social contract, and setting a new course for the national project, in line with the pillars of renewal outlined above.

These steps to rebuild the Palestinian political project are essential to resisting hegemony, confronting colonization, and securing Palestinian survival and liberation. Without such a forward-looking, unifying act of political reconstruction, Palestinians will not be able to achieve these aims—nor will anyone else do so on their behalf.

1. *To read this piece in Spanish please click [here](#). Al-Shabaka is grateful for the efforts by human rights advocates to translate its pieces, but is not responsible for any change in meaning.*

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