

When Israel Tries to Manage the Palestinians, It Only Brings the Next Cycle of Violence Closer

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Since October 2023, a profound and dangerous process has been unfolding before our eyes, one that many fail to notice: the Palestinian people are effectively losing their political representation. Not through a formal or dramatic decision, not through a declaration by the United Nations, but through a combination of a devastating war, Palestinian institutional collapse, and a conscious preference by external actors to manage reality rather than decide the future of the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian issue, which for decades revolved around national rights, sovereignty, and political determination, is increasingly being redefined as a technical problem: who will distribute aid, who will enforce order, who will administer a civilian population, and who will do so without requiring the Palestinians themselves to choose, consent, or bear responsibility.

This dispossession of representation is not a byproduct of chaos, but the result of a deliberate trend. It emerged from the failure of the Palestinian leaderships, but also from an Israeli strategic position and an international tendency to prefer illusory stability over a challenging political solution. The result is a quiet yet fundamental shift from viewing the Palestinians as a people with nationally recognized rights to viewing them as a population lacking a leadership address that must simply be managed.

Until October 2023, the Palestinian arena was marked by a severe representation crisis, but not by a vacuum. The PLO continued to be recognized internationally as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people; the Palestinian Authority exercised limited civilian and security governance in the West Bank; and Hamas ruled the Gaza Strip and presented itself as a national and ideological alternative, albeit an extremist and violent one. The political system was fragmented, frozen, and devoid of legitimacy due to the absence of elections, but it still provided a clear representational framework with identifiable addresses from which accountability could be demanded.

The war in Gaza collapsed that framework as well. Hamas, which embarked on an extreme course under the assumption that an unprecedented attack would return the Palestinian issue to center stage and force a political shift in its favor, lost its ability to function as a governing authority. Its institutions collapsed, its mechanisms were destroyed, and its senior leadership was eliminated or driven underground. Even if the organization retains some military capability and is rehabilitating parts of its institutions with the assistance of Turkey and Qatar, it is not a civilian or political address for the day after, nor an actor from which responsibility toward the population it claims to represent can be demanded.

On the other hand, the Palestinian Authority was exposed in all its weakness. It had no influence on the course of the war and offered no political horizon. Public opinion polls conducted in

December 2023 pointed to a dramatic collapse in Palestinian public trust in Mahmoud Abbas and the Authority, alongside an overwhelming demand for general Palestinian elections and leadership replacement. In practice, the Palestinian Authority continues to exist by virtue of security coordination with Israel, tax revenues transferred from Israel, donations, and international pressure, rather than by virtue of a public mandate.

At this point, external actors enter the picture, and this is where the truly problematic phase begins. The United States, Arab states, and the international community are no longer asking who represents the Palestinians, but how to manage them. The discussion has shifted from rights to regulation, from sovereignty to rehabilitation, from political determination to interim mechanisms. Gaza's future is discussed in terms of "civil administration" and a "stabilizing force," not in terms of choice, representation, and responsibility.

A series of steps taken by Israel, the United States, and Arab states since October 2023 have converged into a process that effectively stripped the Palestinians of their capacity for independent representation: the elimination of Hamas's governing power, the weakening of the Palestinian Authority and the PLO, and international attempts to engineer a "more suitable" Palestinian leadership. The plans for Gaza's future, whether a technocratic government or an international force, do not provide a genuine political solution, but rather a simulated substitute. Their common denominator is the absence of a Palestinian representative mechanism that is elected or broadly agreed upon. The Palestinians are not partners. They have no choice, no mandate, and no commitment to the proposed solutions.

Israel is not a passive observer. The current right-wing government explicitly rejects the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza and opposes any horizon of Palestinian sovereignty. In the absence of a legitimate Palestinian leadership, the claim that "there is no partner" turns from a (distorted) description of reality into a policy that creates reality. The representational vacuum is not a malfunction; it is a political asset in the eyes of the government.

In this case, history is not a literary analogy, but a warning sign. Similar to the events of October 7, the Nakba of 1948, which began with Palestinian rejection of the partition plan and the launch of a war to prevent its implementation, led to the loss of political representation of the Palestinian people. Palestinian society disintegrated, its leadership was eliminated or exiled, and responsibility for addressing the "Palestinian problem" was transferred from the Palestinians to Arab states, both through the signing of the 1949 armistice agreements and during the Lausanne Conciliation Conference that same year regarding Palestinian refugees. The consequence was the loss of a political voice and, no less importantly, the loss of responsibility.

In the absence of a recognized and committed Palestinian body, there was no address capable of making decisions that could be held accountable under international norms. Instead, the Palestinian struggle became a tool in the hands of Arab regimes, which acted according to their own interests rather than those of the Palestinians. The Palestinians were physically present but absent as an independent political entity, a reality reflected in UN resolutions 194 of 1948 and 242 of 1967.

The result of their absence as an independent entity, alongside refusal to recognize Israel, was a wave of violence. In the 1950s and 1960s, alongside attempts at refugee return, the fedayeen emerged, carrying out infiltrations and attacks against Israel. There was no responsible Palestinian leadership from which restraint could be demanded, or that was willing or able to commit to political arrangements, and Arab states absorbed Israel's retaliatory actions.

Only when the international community recognized the PLO in November 1974 as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people (UN General Assembly Resolution 3236) did a change occur in terms of representation. That recognition did not resolve the conflict, but it created a framework of responsibility. Once the PLO became a political address, it was required to bear the costs of its decisions and to confront the demands of the international system.

The culmination of this process came in 1988, when the PLO formally accepted UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, adopted the principle of a political settlement in the Palestinian Declaration of Independence in Algiers, and later, in the Oslo Accords of 1993, recognized the State of Israel within the 1967 borders. This did not happen because the Palestinians abandoned all their aspirations, but because they had a recognized leadership that was subject to international responsibility, which inevitably led to compromise. The historical conclusion is clear: a people without recognized leadership cannot be a partner to an agreement, nor is it bound by rules. In such a situation, violence is not an anomaly, but a structural outcome.

Therefore, the dispossession of Palestinian representation since October 2023 is not merely a moral problem or a political failure, but a strategic danger. Politically, the result is the creation of a dangerous vacuum and an expectation of increasing chaos and extremism. Legally, the result is the entrenchment of Israel's status as an occupying power and the Palestinians' status as a population requiring international protection. Attempting to manage the Palestinians without recognizing their representation does not produce moderation, but precisely recreates the conditions that previously led to violence.

The vacuum pushes Palestinian society toward radicalization, decentralization of power, the rise of local militias, and the weakening of any unifying national framework. In the West Bank, signs of this are already evident, with the erosion of Palestinian Authority authority in refugee camps and northern cities. Legally, the dispossession of representation entrenches Israel's responsibility as an occupying power. The absence of a functioning Palestinian Authority, and the lack of a recognized local government in Gaza, strengthen the claim that responsibility for the civilian population rests with Israel under international law. Israel's attempt to manage Gaza "from a distance" or through external actors does not absolve it of this responsibility.

International concern is also growing regarding the status of the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people. The Riyadh summit of Arab states in November 2023 reaffirmed that the PLO is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and called for territorial unity between Gaza and the West Bank. In practice, however, decisions are made without the Palestinians, who are presented as a humanitarian problem rather than a people with political rights. Among Palestinians in the diaspora, this process intensifies alienation from the proposed solutions. Millions of refugees, who once viewed the PLO as a symbolic address, now find themselves excluded from discussions about their future. The mass protests worldwide since

October 2023 express not only solidarity with Gaza, but also a demand for representation that has been stripped away.

Israel, the United States, Arab states, and Europe must internalize that prolonged control over a people without representation does not eliminate responsibility; it deepens it. It does not bring security, but postpones decision-making and prepares the ground for the next cycle of violence. Those who strip the Palestinians of their representation do not neutralize extremism, but preemptively relinquish the possibility of demanding responsibility. Ignoring the lessons of history at this stage is neither naïveté nor necessity; it is a choice. And that choice leads backward, not forward, not to a solution but to the repetition of a known failure. Without representation, there is no responsibility. Without responsibility, there is no commitment.

This situation calls for creative solutions. Restoring legitimacy to Palestinian representation will require comprehensive reform of the PLO, holding general elections with the participation of all factions and refugees in the diaspora, and giving special attention to the educated younger generation seeking change. Failure to achieve Palestinian unity may lead to continued “conflict management” by external actors, foremost among them Israel, and to the deferral of its resolution to an unknown future.

What is clear is that the Palestinian people themselves have not relinquished their aspiration for representation and liberation, which is legitimate and deeply rooted. However, the tools for achieving it have been taken from them, turning the PLO’s foundational principle of independent decision-making into a dead letter. Whether, out of the ruins of Gaza and the crisis in the West Bank, the Palestinians will succeed in forming a new, unified leadership that regains international legitimacy remains to be seen in the coming years.