



Academic Paper

The Struggle for Reconstruction in the Gaza Strip



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Prof. Dr. Walid ‘Abd al-Hay¹

Introduction

Following the ceasefire agreement after Operation al-Aqsa Flood on 19/1/2025, the challenge of rebuilding the Gaza Strip (GS) will be as daunting as the war itself. The widespread destruction of vital infrastructure and essential services, coupled with limited financial resources and a weakened gross domestic product (GDP), complicates the post-war recovery process. Furthermore, soft power tactics—such as material and financial aid, lifting the siege, and facilitating entry into GS—will be weaponized by the opponents of Hamas and the resistance forces to extract strategic political concessions they failed to secure on the battlefield. Led by Israel, certain European nations and some Arab countries, these opponents will aim to obstruct, interfere with, or even prevent aid. The policies of some of these parties toward the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) illustrate this, with former US President Donald Trump’s stance further exacerbating these concerns.



This calls for the development of an integrated strategy to mobilize the resources and influence of all international parties, both governmental and non-governmental, in support of the reconstruction plan.

First: The Post-War Reality

According to UN reports and other reliable sources, preliminary estimates reveal that GS sustained the following damage from the war:²

- ▶ 1. 69% of Gaza’s infrastructure was destroyed, requiring 3–5 years for reconstruction at an estimated cost of \$18.5 billion, solely for infrastructure. This amount is equivalent to seven times Gaza’s GDP based on 2022 data. Restoring the region to its pre-war state in all aspects may take until 2040, according to estimates from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).



- ▶ 2. Israeli military operations have damaged approximately 370 thousand housing units, including the complete destruction of 79 thousand.
- ▶ 3. Approximately 68% of agricultural land dedicated to crop and other crop production has been damaged, resulting in a significant reduction in productivity. Additionally, between 80% and 96% of agricultural facilities, including irrigation canals, animal farms, storage centers, and agricultural machinery, have suffered severe damage.
- ▶ 4. Disposing of approximately 50 million tons of rubble is an urgent task that, even with 100 trucks operating full-time daily during working hours, is estimated to take 15 years. Moreover, the limited space in GS complicates efforts to unload and transport the debris to designated areas.
- ▶ 5. Extracting victims' bodies from the rubble is further complicated by the presence of unexploded ordnance and sharp objects. The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) estimates that GS contains approximately 7,500 tons of unexploded ordnance.
- ▶ 6. Approximately 37 million tons of waste need to be removed from the environment in GS.
- ▶ 7. Israeli attacks have killed over 46,600 people and injured more than 110 thousand, though the actual numbers are likely much higher. Half of Gaza's 36 hospitals are still partially functioning, while nearly all have been damaged or partially destroyed. Only 38% of primary health care centers remain operational. An estimated 25% of the injured—around 30 thousand people—suffer from life-changing injuries and will need ongoing rehabilitation.
- ▶ 8. Based on preliminary estimates by the Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS) at UNDP, GS requires approximately \$40 billion for reconstruction, with \$2–3 billion needed urgently.³ Other estimates place the total need between \$50–80 billion. The UN warns that if Israel continues to impose obstacles to aid, reconstruction could take up to 350 years to complete.

The preceding facts highlight the immense challenge facing the GS administration in achieving reconstruction, making it crucial to focus on funding sources—particularly those less likely to tie their aid to political conditions. This paper aims to identify and examine the most significant of these sources:

1. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is the world's second-largest international organization after the United Nations, with 57 member countries and a total Muslim



population of 1.662 billion, excluding Muslim minorities in non-Muslim-majority countries.⁴

In 2018, the OIC has laid the groundwork for cooperation between the Red Crescent Societies in member states and the International Red Cross Societies to provide humanitarian aid and alleviate suffering. “Since 2021, the OIC has also assisted the Afghan people in their humanitarian crisis by providing them technical and financial support.”⁵

A review of the economic and financial potential of OIC member states highlights the following key aspects:⁶

- ▶ a. As of 2023, the GDP of the OIC member states, measured on a Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) basis, stands at \$8.769 trillion. Notably, from 2019 to early 2023, economic growth rates saw a continuous increase, reaching a total growth of \$1.6 trillion during this period.
- ▶ b. The GDP of OIC accounts for 8.3% of the global total.
- ▶ c. The GDP of OIC countries accounts for 19.5% of the total GDP of the 152 developing countries.

If we calculate the GDP of the OIC countries, which totals approximately \$8.8 trillion, and assume that GS requires \$50 billion in funding, this means the countries would need to contribute about 0.5–0.6% of their annual GDP. If the subsidy is spread over three years, the burden would be reduced to 0.1–0.2% of GDP. However, if additional funding sources (as we will demonstrate) are available, the financial burden on OIC countries would be lower than these percentages, whether calculated over the entire three-year period or for total support across the whole duration.

Muslim countries must ensure their aid aligns with international trends to maximize impact and effectiveness. At the global level, net total Official Development Assistance (ODA) in current prices received by all developing countries increased by 46.1% from \$139.4 billion in 2011 to \$203.7 billion in 2021, that’s a consistent annual increase of over 4%. On the other hand, the total amount of ODA received by the OIC countries group increased by 73.8% from \$45.4 billion in 2011 to \$78.9 billion in current prices in 2021. With respect to achieving the 0.7% ODA/gross national income (GNI) target, OIC countries are leading among all the donors. Saudi Arabia ranked first country both among OIC countries and globally in 2021 with 1.01% ODA/GNI rate with a substantial increase from 0.24% in 2019. Türkiye became the second largest donor among OIC countries and third globally with 0.96% in 2021.⁷



This highlights the clear financial opportunities for OIC to support the State of Palestine, a member of the organization and a Muslim nation. It also serves as a measure of the Islamic commitment to the first *Qiblah*, the third holiest site and the Palestinian people as a whole.

A detailed scientific report highlights the significant role of Islamic Waqf bodies in OIC countries, estimating their assets at approximately \$105 billion and noting their involvement in hundreds of projects both within Muslim countries and abroad. These institutions are well-positioned to support reconstruction efforts in GS, particularly as many have financial portfolios dedicated to rebuilding and investment. The report emphasizes that the proven success of endowment projects qualifies them to provide substantial support, with investment growth in these initiatives exceeding 3%.⁸

Islamic banks can play a vital role in reconstruction efforts, with institutions like the Islamic Solidarity Bank for Development serving as a model. The International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) has experience collaborating with UNRWA, notably providing medical equipment to around 22 healthcare centers in the GS in 2020. Islamic Relief, active in 45 countries and partnering with numerous Islamic charitable organizations in the West, manages 827 projects across 39 countries. With a strong track record in Gaza, it operates 16 humanitarian projects and has assisted over 711 thousand individuals, demonstrating significant potential to contribute to the region's reconstruction.⁹



Opinion polls by reputable organizations show that Indonesia, for example, leads the world as the most charitable country. This highlights the potential of engaging Muslim societies through associations, organizations, political parties and unions to mobilize popular donations within these communities.¹⁰

2. Arab Countries

The Arab GDP is approximately \$3.44 trillion, and if we consider the GS estimated need of \$50 billion, it represents 1.5% of the GDP. Spread over three years, this amounts to 0.5% of the GDP annually.¹¹ When comparing this to the aid provided by Arab countries during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia contributed an average of \$8 billion in both official and popular support.¹² Furthermore, when comparing the financial contributions of Arab countries to other Arab and non-Arab countries between 1973 and 1989, it is evident that the support given relative to the GDP of each Arab country exceeded what is required to help GS.



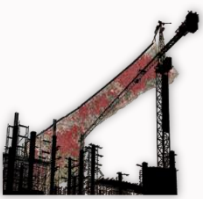
Private organizations and Arab charitable associations are playing a significant role in providing support and assistance, with some charitable funds and banks in Arab countries actively contributing.¹³ Opinion polls indicate that 87% of Arabs are willing to make donations, especially during Ramadan,¹⁴ presenting an opportunity that should be capitalized on as the holy month approaches. Additionally, several Arab Islamic organizations have already begun collecting donations for GS, both during the recent Operation al-Aqsa Flood and continuing now, highlighting the importance and impact of these organizations, which provide aid without any political conditions.¹⁵

3. Foreign Countries



In 2023, ODA worldwide reached \$223.7 billion, marking an increase of over \$12 billion from 2022, largely driven by the war in Ukraine. However, these figures may decline due to the pragmatic approach to foreign aid adopted by US President Donald Trump, particularly regarding assistance to developing countries.¹⁶ However, several non-Arab and non-Muslim countries have expressed their readiness to support Gaza's reconstruction following the UN Secretary-General's call for rapid rebuilding.¹⁷ A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson affirmed that "China supports the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to Gaza, as well as help with its post-war reconstruction."¹⁸ Meanwhile, the Japanese Foreign Ministry reiterated its support for the ceasefire, stating that "Japan, in close communication with the countries and international organizations concerned, will continue to engage with the international efforts concerning the improvement of the humanitarian situations, the reconstruction and governance of Gaza, and will redouble its diplomatic efforts towards achieving a two-state solution and establishing long-term peace and stability in the region."¹⁹ As for Russia, its Foreign Ministry spokesperson stated, "We hope the implementation of this agreement will contribute to the sustainable stabilization of Gaza, enable the return of displaced persons, and support the reconstruction of infrastructure damaged during the conflict."²⁰ The European Union also endorsed the agreement, committing €120 million (€1=\$1.04) for reconstruction efforts.²¹ Likewise, India welcomed the announcement, with its Foreign Ministry stating, "We welcome the announcement of the agreement for the release of hostages and a ceasefire in Gaza. We hope this will lead to a safe and sustained supply of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza."²² Many other countries that back Palestinian rights, particularly in Latin America, the Nordic region and Africa, are expected to join the effort to provide material support for Gaza.



Donald Trump



4. Other International Organizations

- ▶ **a. UN Specialized Bodies:** According to a World Health Organization (WHO) report, WHO is ready to scale up the response together with UN health partners including United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNRWA and 67 Health Cluster partners. However, it is critical that the security obstacles hindering operations are removed. WHO will need conditions on the ground that allow systematic access to the population across Gaza, enabling the influx of aid via all possible borders and routes, and lifting restrictions on the entry of essential items. Also essential are active protection of civilians and health-care workers, expediting medical evacuations through all possible routes for over 12 thousand patients (and their companions) who urgently require specialized care, strengthening and speeding up the referral system to East Jerusalem and the West Bank (WB), and addressing road repairs, rubble removal and the remediation of unexploded ordnances.²³
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- ▶ **b. Regional Organizations,** such as the African Union (AU), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Council of Europe (CoE), Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), and Union of South American Nations (USAN), etc, often have overlapping memberships. For instance, all the League of Arab States (LAS) countries are members of OIC, and most Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) members are also part of the OIC, leading to membership overlaps. However, these organizations tend to be slower in responding to crises compared to individual countries, as their decisions require meetings and discussions among members. While their capacities vary, and some may lack relief or aid programs, most contribute in other ways to providing assistance.
- ▶ **c. International Non-Governmental Organizations and Bodies of the Global Community (Non-Arab and Non-Muslim):** Due to the sheer number of charities and relief organizations, many of which are driven by humanitarian motives, some are as large and financially capable as smaller countries, with extensive project portfolios. For instance, Welthungerhilfe is one of the largest private aid organizations in Germany; it is politically independent and non-denominational. It is striving for a world without hunger. Since it was founded on 14/12/1962, 12,128 overseas projects in about 72 countries have been supported with €5.07 billion. Welthungerhilfe follows the principle of empowering people to help themselves to sustainably improve their
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living conditions, offering everything from fast disaster relief to reconstruction and long-term development cooperation projects with national and international partner organizations.²⁴

Second: Caveats

The issue of conditional international aid, whether politically, economically or socially, has sparked widespread debate among scholars of international relations. Some argue that conditional aid has failed to achieve the desired outcomes and has even undermined international stability,²⁵ while others remain more reserved on the matter.²⁶

The link between political orientations and the dynamics of donor-recipient relationships is crucial. Donations often serve as a tool for influencing and penetrating other societies, targeting elites, civic organizations, minorities, sects, rulers, or even society as a whole.

The historical context reveals that the countries providing the most aid to the Palestinians—such as the US, Europe and some Gulf states—are often the most politically adversarial toward them, while less adversarial countries tend to offer the least support. A comparison of Chinese, Russian or Gulf support with that of the US or Europe illustrates this dynamic. However, this does not mean that all countries explicitly link aid to Palestinian political behavior, as seen with some Nordic countries.

The leadership in GS should focus on less hostile countries, as they are likely to be less demanding, and rely on non-governmental sectors, particularly humanitarian and UN specialized agencies. Additionally, it should leverage the negative image of Israel that has been reinforced by large segments of the international community, including Western societies, making the response to aid more supportive. This was evident in the widespread popular movements and demonstrations in support of Palestine.

Third: Recommendations

The above indicates that the scale of the damage and the economic situation in GS require an immediate initiative to:

- ▶ 1. Urge international organizations, particularly relief agencies and development funds in Arab and Muslim countries, to convene and discuss strategies for helping GS recover from the effects of the aggression, as previously highlighted during the war.



- ▶ 2. Recognize popular organizations in Arab and Muslim countries as a key source for urgent communication and for mobilizing all forms of aid for GS.
- ▶ 3. Urge Arab and Muslim media outlets to dedicate programs encouraging aid to GS.
- ▶ 4. Considering the potential for certain parties (both Arab and non-Arab) to raise procedural concerns about the entities responsible for receiving and managing donations and aid, we recommend that UNRWA, as an international body, take over this responsibility. This suggestion is particularly relevant in light of historical and ongoing disagreements between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and resistance forces leading GS. Alternatively, UNRWA could collaborate with international bodies representing Palestinian civil society or carefully selected international organizations.

This measure helps to:

- Prevent the conflict of jurisdiction between the local administration in GS and the PA from delaying the provision of aid, a goal that aligns with Israeli interests.
- Strengthen the position of UNRWA, which Israeli diplomacy aims to weaken, especially considering US President Trump's negative stance on the agency.
- Ensure maximum transparency in the management of facilities and funds involved in the reconstruction project.



Endnotes

- ¹ An expert in futures studies, a former professor in the Department of Political Science at Yarmouk University in Jordan and a holder of Ph.D. in Political Science from Cairo University. He is also a former member of the Board of Trustees of Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan, Irbid National University, the National Center for Human Rights, the Board of Grievances and the Supreme Council of Media. He has authored 37 books, most of which are focused on future studies in both theoretical and practical terms, and published 120 research papers in peer-reviewed academic journals.
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