

Gaza: Arab countries unwilling to assume future control

Why are Arab states reluctant to play a part in the political future of the Gaza Strip after the current conflict quiets?

[Jordan's](#) Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi did not mince his words during the Manama Dialogue of the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

"All of us have to speak loud and clear about the catastrophe that the [Israeli war](#) is bringing, not just on Gaza, but on the region in general," he said in Bahrain in mid-November.

Safadi's words highlight that even those Arab states that have diplomatically recognized Israel are currently distancing themselves from its military response to the [Hamas terror attack](#) on October 7. Hamas is classified as a terrorist organization in Germany, the European Union, the US and elsewhere.

The solidarity that Arabs feel for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip — especially in view of the high and rising death toll — outweighs this [far-reaching classification](#).

Focus on Palestinian plight

However, Arab states have also made it clear they are unwilling to play a part in establishing a new political order in the [Gaza Strip](#) after the end of the war, which is not yet foreseeable.

Arab states are not prepared to let Israel have its way and then "come and clean the mess after Israel," stressed Safadi.

Representatives of the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have expressed similar views.

One factor in their reluctance is the question of security, and whether Israel will really succeed in destroying Hamas and rendering it harmless.



Accepting political or even military responsibility in the Gaza Strip, where Hamas structures, or at least sympathy for the terrorist organization could possibly persist, would put Arab countries in an extremely [delicate situation](#).

Jordan's foreign minister therefore does not see the responsibility for the Palestinian territory's political future with Jordan or other Arab nations.

"Let me be very clear," said Ayman Safadi, "there will be no Arab troops going to Gaza. None. We're not going to be seen as the enemy."

Ambivalent attitude

"It is no coincidence that the Jordanian foreign minister is particularly vocal about his reservations," Nicolas Fromm, a political scientist at the Helmut Schmidt University in Hamburg, told DW. "Jordan has had a peace treaty with Israel for a long time and the two countries have been working together in many ways for which the kingdom has been widely criticized in parts of the Arab world."

Other Arab states, especially those in the Gulf, are likely to be in a similar situation. Some of them, such as the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, only concluded normalization agreements with [Israel](#) a few years ago. Others, such as Saudi Arabia, maintained good, albeit unofficial, relations with Israel until the beginning of 2023. They, too, are now likely to find themselves in hot water, as parts of the population are opposed to this course, Fromm said.

"The Palestinian question continues to play a major role in the Arab world and has great emotional and political mobilization potential," Eckart Woertz, director of the Hamburg-based GIGA Institute of Middle East Studies, told DW.

The public mood cannot be ignored by those in power, he added.

But at least some Gulf states are likely to have a rather ambivalent attitude towards Hamas, he said.

"After all, it is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is considered a terrorist organization in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates," Woertz told DW.

Therefore, these countries' governments might be quietly pleased if Hamas was neutralized in the Gaza Strip, or at least restricted in its scope.

Financial restraint

A further major challenge for the time after the war will be financial aid. Gaza, which has been blockaded by Israel and Egypt on and off for years, is unlikely to manage rebuilding its infrastructure on its own.

"But no one, neither Israel, nor America, nor the Arab states or Palestinian leaders, want to take responsibility," summarized the London-based business magazine *The Economist* after the meeting in Manama.

"They have already rebuilt Gaza several times," the article quotes an unnamed Western diplomat as saying. If the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip "is not part of a serious peace process, they will not pay."

Middle East expert Woertz considers a lasting political solution, specifically a two-state solution with East Jerusalem as capital of a Palestinian state, to be the minimum prerequisite for a possible subsequent Arab involvement in the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip.

"You can't just rebuild every few years and then destroy it again," he said. "The European Union and the Gulf states probably have a similar view."

Biden administration privately warned by American diplomats of growing fury against US in Arab world

CNN — The [Biden administration](#) has received stark warnings from American diplomats in the Arab world that its strong support for [Israel's destructive and deadly military campaign](#) in Gaza “is losing us Arab publics for a generation,” according to a diplomatic cable obtained by CNN. The cable underscores profound concern among American officials about the growing anger against the United States that erupted soon after Israel launched its operations against Hamas, following the militant group's attacks in Israel on October 7 that left over 1,400 Israelis dead.

“We are losing badly on the messaging battlespace,” reads a Wednesday cable from the US Embassy in Oman, citing conversations with “a wide range of trusted and sober-minded contacts.”

The robust US support for Israel's actions is being seen, the cable warns, “as material and moral culpability in what they consider to be possible war crimes.”

The cable from the embassy was written by the second-highest US official in Muscat and sent to, among others, the White House's National Security Council, the CIA and the FBI. While it's just one cable from a regional embassy, it provides a private snapshot of the alarm over the growing anti-US wave sweeping the Middle East.

Another cable obtained by CNN from the American embassy in Cairo relayed back to Washington, as part of a daily media summary, the commentary in a state-run Egyptian newspaper that “President Biden's cruelty and disregard for Palestinians exceeded all previous US presidents.”



CNN has reached out to the State Department for comment.

President Joe Biden has been under growing pressure domestically and abroad over US support of Israel amid images of destruction in Gaza and the dire humanitarian crisis in the region. While the administration has resisted calls for a ceasefire, officials have worked to ramp up aid going into Gaza and pushed for humanitarian pauses to allow more assistance to flow into the enclave and to allow civilians to flee away from the fighting.

In recent days, US allies in the Arab world have made clear their deep anger at the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Last weekend, Secretary of State Antony Blinken attended a summit convened by the Jordanian foreign minister that was attended by the top diplomats from Egypt, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia, as well as the secretary general of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

At the summit, the Arab leaders called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza while Blinken reiterated US opposition, arguing that it would give Hamas time to regroup and launch another attack on Israel.

The White House said Thursday that [Israel had agreed to move](#) forward with daily four-hour [pauses of military operations](#) in areas of Northern Gaza.

Blinken had an agreement in principle on the pauses after his meetings in Israel last week, even though Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu came out against the idea of humanitarian pauses on Friday, US officials told CNN. That was seen as the Israeli prime minister playing to his coalition, and the officials noted it was similar to when the Israeli government opposed humanitarian aid getting into Gaza before deciding to allow it.

Although Israel had already been instituting such pauses, American officials see this agreement as progress because the Israelis are using the language of “pauses,” which is something the US believes it can build on.

Still, within the administration, concerns have grown over US support for Israel.

[CNN previously reported](#) that some senior officials privately say there are aspects of Israel’s military operations [they simply cannot stomach defending](#); calls for the US to back a ceasefire are growing among government employees; and others are distraught by the incessant images of Palestinian civilians being killed by Israeli airstrikes.

Biden has also been confronted by the frustration growing domestically.

The president was confronted by a [protester calling for a ceasefire](#) at a private fundraiser last week; pro-Palestinian protests have been a daily occurrence near the White House compound; and this week, one of the entrances near the West Wing was covered in bright-red handprints – meant to mimic blood – and words like “genocide Joe.”