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EVALUATION NOTE

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THE GAZA RECONSTRUCTION?

Once again at the center of global attention, Gaza has become not only the site of a humanitarian crisis but also a stage for deep regional and global fractures following the outbreak of conflict on October 7, 2023. Although the large-scale clashes that erupted on this date—and the ongoing Israeli blockade that began after Hamas took control of Gaza through a coup against Palestinian Authority (PA) in 2006—have further exposed and deepened the crises in Gaza, the region was already grappling with chronic uncertainty even before these devastating events. For years, the Gaza Strip has existed in a condition described as "permanent temporariness," a state marked by ambiguous governance and unstable spatial arrangements.

The area has long been managed through "temporary" solutions that have, paradoxically, become permanent. Urban planning, public services, and infrastructure development have been systematically disrupted due to security constraints and external dependency. With 2.3 million people crammed into a narrow strip of just 365 square kilometers, Gaza has one of the lowest per capita living space ratios in the world. This extreme density severely hampers the feasibility of implementing any structured development strategies.

While discussions on housing policy, green space distribution, transport networks, and the spatial coherence of public facilities may seem impossible during ongoing conflict,

¹<https://www.tepav.org.tr/en/ekibimiz/s/1472>

²<https://www.tepav.org.tr/en/ekibimiz/s/1462>

We would like to thank M. Can Torun, student of Political Science and Public Administration at METU, for his contributions.

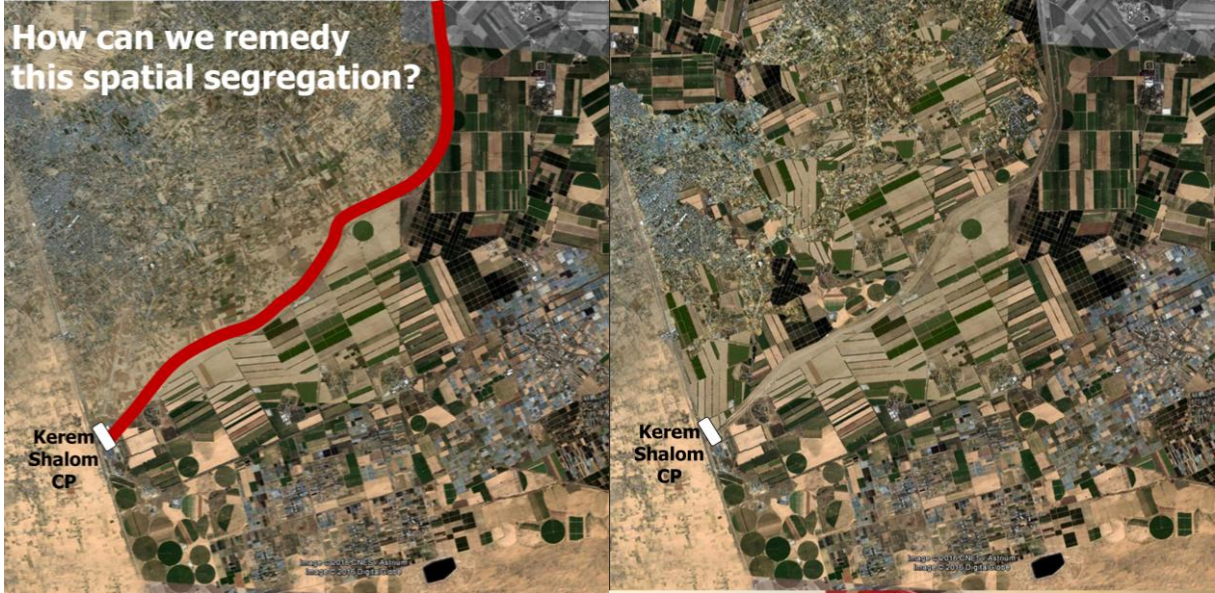
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these are precisely the issues that must be urgently addressed in any post-conflict reconstruction or transformation process.

To better understand the spatial impact of this structural collapse, the satellite image below provides a critical frame of reference. The stark contrast in agricultural intensity, infrastructure patterns, and urban organization between the Gaza Strip and its surrounding settlements reflects not only physical inequality but also the spatial manifestation of political separation. The dramatic differences observed along the border line reveal the fragmentation produced by war and blockade on an urban scale, and they also underscore how essential spatial justice will be in any post-war rebuilding efforts.

While the first image highlights this division, the second collage proposes a more balanced, well-planned, and cooperative vision of spatial density that points toward possible pathways for overcoming such disparity.

Figure 1: Overcrowding in Gaza before the war



This multi-dimensional crisis has evolved into an issue of societal reconstruction that goes far beyond traditional security paradigms. Today, the main challenge facing Gaza is not merely the destruction of buildings, but the displacement of communities, the fragmentation of public spaces, the dismantling of administrative capacity, and the erosion of social trust. Therefore, discussing Gaza's future necessarily involves more than asking, "What will be rebuilt physically?"—it also requires addressing, "By whom, how, and on the basis of which values will it be governed?"

This article aims to examine the complex crisis environment that has emerged in the aftermath of the war in Gaza from the perspective of urban policy and planning, focusing on governance, legitimacy, and social repair as key dimensions of the reconstruction process. A comprehensive post-war rebuilding effort must go beyond mere infrastructure investments; it demands an approach rooted in collective memory, participatory planning, spatial justice, and local capacity.

Ultimately, every reconstruction effort is also an act of “imagining the future.” And the future of Gaza will depend on which values guide that vision—and who the actors are that help shape it.

The Scale and Spatial Distribution of Destruction in Gaza

The military operations launched after October 7, 2023, have not only targeted civilians in the Gaza Strip but also inflicted widespread destruction on the physical, social, and administrative infrastructure. The resulting devastation highlights the multi-dimensional nature of the reconstruction process that will be required in the post-war period. The spatial integrity of essential life functions—housing, education, healthcare, commerce, worship, and production—has been seriously disrupted at nearly every scale.

To understand the extent of destruction and the characteristics of the pre-war urban fabric, the university campus shown in Figure 2 offers a significant example in terms of spatial memory. In the satellite image taken before the war, the campus layout is clearly based on a grid system, with balanced building density and the integration of green spaces and social amenities into the overall plan. This spatial pattern, created with careful attention to the relationship between built and open areas, represents not just a physical settlement but also the continuity of public life and the functionality of space.

However, in the post-war image of the same area, both the physical structures and the social infrastructure appear to have almost entirely collapsed. This represents not only structural destruction but also the erasure of spatial references deeply embedded in the city’s collective memory. It underscores the need for the reconstruction process to address not only the physical dimensions of space but also its mnemonic and social aspects.

Therefore, a conventional approach to “reconstruction” in Gaza is insufficient. What is needed is not just the rebuilding of concrete structures, but the regeneration of pre-existing spatial patterns, social relationships, and public spaces. This makes it clear that spatial planning must be conceived not only from an engineering standpoint but also through the lens of social repair.

Figure 2: Gaza main university campus before and after the war, TEPAV visualisation

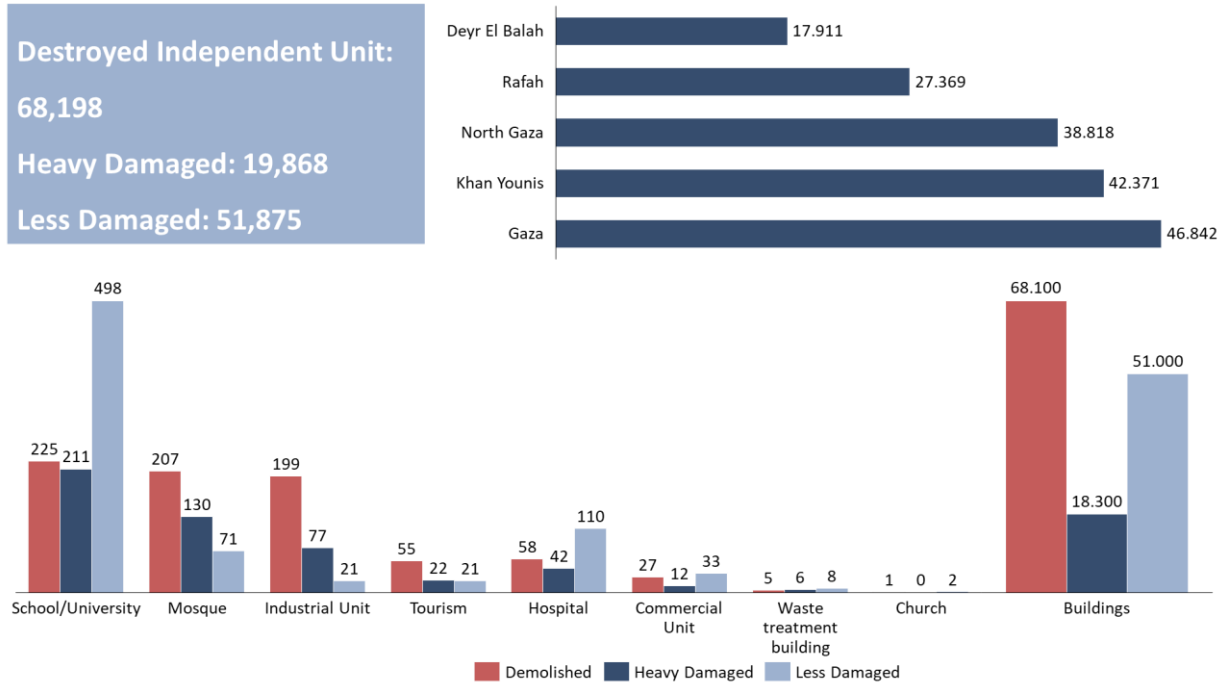




The Numerical Toll of Destruction

According to available data, a total of 68,198 individual units across Gaza have been completely destroyed, 19,868 have sustained severe damage, and 51,875 have been classified as slightly damaged. In total, this means approximately 140,000 structural units have been directly affected. The damage extends not only to residential buildings but also to numerous buildings serving public and economic functions:

- **Schools and Universities:** 225 have been completely destroyed, 211 severely damaged, and 498 slightly damaged. The extent of this damage to educational infrastructure poses a threat that could trigger long-term intergenerational social disruption.
- **Mosques and Places of Worship:** A total of 207 mosques have been destroyed, 130 severely damaged, and 71 slightly damaged. This also indicates significant harm to social solidarity networks.
- **Industrial and Commercial Units:** 199 industrial facilities have been destroyed and 77 severely damaged. Among commercial units, 27 have been destroyed and 45 damaged. These figures reflect a serious weakening of the region's production and employment capacity.
- **Hospitals:** 58 hospitals have been completely destroyed, 42 severely damaged, and 110 slightly damaged. This indicates a major loss of functionality in Gaza's healthcare infrastructure.
- **Residential Buildings:** 68,100 buildings have been destroyed, 18,300 severely damaged, and 51,000 slightly damaged. This level of destruction directly affects the housing rights of hundreds of thousands of people.

Figure 3: Damage/destruction table in Gaza, UNOSAT, TEPAV calculations

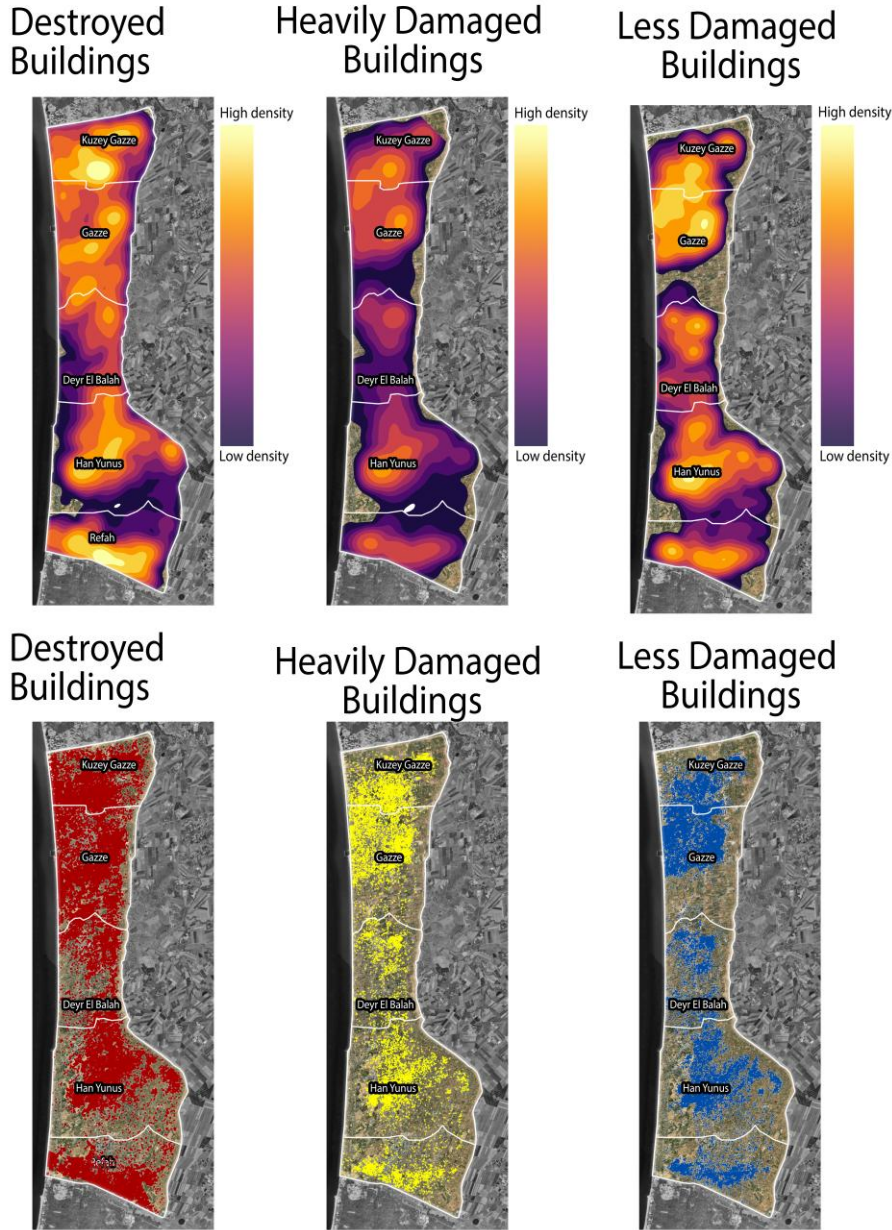
Spatial Distribution and Damage Intensity

Although the destruction has spread across the entire Gaza Strip, certain areas have been affected with far greater intensity. Maps indicate that the regions of North Gaza, Gaza City, Khan Younis, and Rafah exhibit the highest concentrations of both destroyed and severely damaged structures.

- North Gaza and Gaza City are the areas with the highest density of both destroyed and heavily damaged buildings. This indicates a pattern of systematic targeting in the most densely populated urban zones.
- Khan Younis and Rafah stand out as the southern regions where losses in housing and infrastructure are especially concentrated. These areas are also critically important as potential zones for the relocation and resettlement of displaced populations.
- While the Deir al-Balah region has suffered relatively less damage compared to others, it may soon face pressure from incoming displaced populations seeking resettlement.

The density maps (Figure 3) notably highlight the spatial selectivity of the destruction. This selectivity is not merely the result of random bombardment but appears to stem from strategic targeting aimed at dismantling urban infrastructure. Public service zones, major transportation routes, and densely populated residential areas have been among the primary targets of these attacks.

Figure 4: Spatial distribution of damage/destruction in Gaza, UNOSAT, Tepav calculations



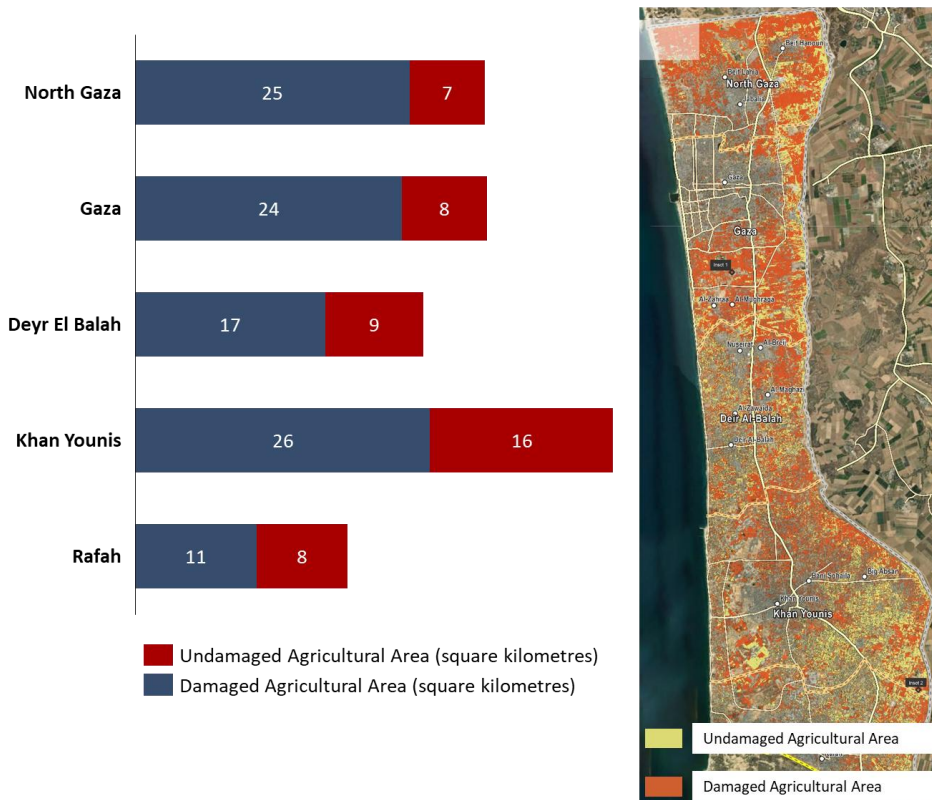
The war in the Gaza Strip has devastated not only urban areas but also the region's agricultural production infrastructure. As shown in Figure 4, a total of 103 square kilometers of farmland in North Gaza, Gaza City, Deir al-Balah, Khan Younis, and Rafah districts has been directly damaged. This signals a major disruption with potentially long-term consequences for food security, livelihoods, and the rural economy.

In other words, the destruction of essential inputs—such as food—that are both vital for survival and sources of income, also serves as a stark warning about the challenges of sustaining life in the reconstruction phase.

An answer to the question of what should be done for agriculture: The highest level of agricultural damage has been recorded in the Khan Younis area (26 km²), followed by North Gaza (25 km²), Gaza City (24 km²), and Deir al-Balah (17 km²). The destruction of farmland due to the war signifies not just a loss of production, but also introduces serious uncertainties regarding the future cultivability of the soil.

To make the surviving areas functional again, there is a pressing need for a comprehensive agricultural inventory, as well as a reassessment of irrigation systems and soil fertility. The map data visualizes the spread of agricultural destruction on the ground, making it possible to geographically guide intervention priorities and agricultural policies.

Figure 5: Spatial distribution of damage/destruction to agricultural areas in Gaza, UNOSAT, Tepav calculations



The Reconstruction of Gaza is an Urban Development Issue

The reconstruction process in Gaza is not merely a technical matter of addressing the physical destruction caused by war. On the contrary, it is a profound urbanization issue—one that involves decisions about how the space will be shaped, for whom, and what kind of life will be organized there. Rebuilding essential needs such as housing, infrastructure, and services inevitably also entails redefining social organization, spatial classifications, and everyday life practices.

Therefore, Gaza's future should not be viewed solely in terms of the buildings that will be reconstructed, but as a broader transformation space—where a new urban order, sense of belonging, and public life will also take form.

Urbanization is not always simply a matter of population growth or building density. It also encompasses the relationship between power and space, the extent to which individuals can exercise their right to the city, and the social consequences of spatial decisions. Even before the war, Gaza's urban structure had been shaped by pressure, restriction, and isolation; the everyday life of a society under blockade was constrained not only physically, but also administratively and economically. In this context, reconstruction presents both a risk and an opportunity: it could either reproduce the problems of the past or pave the way for a just and liberating urban structure. How housing policies are shaped will determine not just where people live, but also who has access to public spaces, services, and safety. The construction—or neglect—of public spaces will directly affect the possibilities for social cohesion, shared memory, and collective life in the city. At this point, the term “reconstruction” must be understood as referring not only to the rebuilding of concrete structures, but also to the redefinition of social space.

Gaza's re-urbanization process is also a decision about whether to erase or preserve the spatial traces of violence. Questions such as where, how, and under what conditions displaced communities will return; what will replace destroyed structures; and whom new public spaces will include—these are not only technical concerns but deeply political choices. Thus, this process is not merely about rebuilding, but about inscribing a vision of society into space.

For this reason, Gaza's reconstruction must be approached as an interdisciplinary urban process—one that places spatial justice, the right to the city, and collective memory at its core. Otherwise, every physical intervention risks reinforcing existing inequalities and laying the groundwork for new conflicts.

Governance Models and International Actors in the Reconstruction Process

Another issue as complex as the physical scale of the destruction in Gaza is the governance vacuum that has emerged in the aftermath of the war. In a context where infrastructure has almost entirely collapsed, public services have ceased, and local administrative capacity has been paralyzed, the question of how and by whom the reconstruction process will be carried out has become a central topic of debate.

At this point, what's needed is not just structural rebuilding, but also political, institutional, and social reconstruction on multiple levels. Given the scale of destruction described above and the historical dynamics embedded in the relationship between people and space, there is a risk that externally driven reconstruction efforts—if imposed without local grounding—could take on a directive and coercive character. This could compromise legitimacy and provoke strong expressions of discontent in a region already prone to tension.

So, what path should be taken? In this regard, the RAND³ report, along with many experts and institutions, offers the following framework as a proposed solution:

³ RAND Corporation - “Postwar Gaza: Pathways to Reconstruction, Governance, and Security”

Provisional Multilateral Management Mechanism

In the first phase, it is proposed that a temporary, multi-party administrative mechanism be established to fill the governance vacuum in Gaza. Under this model:

- International actors such as the United Nations, the European Union, and the Arab League would assume supportive and supervisory roles;
- Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority and representatives of local communities would be placed at the center of the process.

The proposed mechanism is significant in two key respects. First, it opens the door for local participation in a way that avoids externally imposed or exclusionary approaches, allowing the local population to feel genuinely involved in the process. Considering that land ownership lies at the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, excluding local communities would only reinforce the historical roots of the issue and hinder any lasting solution.

The involvement of the Palestinian Authority (led by Fatah, based in Jerusalem) and local communities not only supports the principle of legitimacy but also reduces the risk of marginalization. This, in turn, can prevent non-state armed groups from capitalizing on dissatisfaction and attempting to claim power.

So, how should local actors and the Palestinian Authority be included? What steps should be taken in this regard?

Strengthening Local Capacity and Participatory Mechanisms

In this context, strengthening local actors instead of relying on external intervention emerges as the most immediate and viable solution. However, the destruction in Gaza has severely impacted these very actors as well. Therefore, it is essential to empower municipalities, neighborhood organizations, technical chambers, and civil society organizations by providing them with the necessary resources and capacity, and by building inclusive mechanisms that allow them a voice—rather than excluding them. This would transform them from passive recipients of change into active agents shaping it.

If such an inclusive mechanism is established—one that embraces and involves local actors—the communities living in Gaza can evolve from being mere “aid recipients” into a society that actively designs its own future. This approach could also serve as a strong, positive example for similar contexts.

Moreover, the participation of local communities in the process would not only enhance social cohesion, but also function as a key mechanism for ensuring fair distribution of resources, setting priorities locally, and achieving spatial justice.

The Role of International Actors: Facilitating but Not Defining

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has a historical background spanning more than a century. Throughout the wars, clashes, and reciprocal actions, both regional and global actors—as well as international institutions—have played significant roles. Considering the scale of destruction in Gaza and the resulting humanitarian and financial toll, it is inevitable that these actors will also be involved in the reconstruction process. However, the scope of their involvement must

be clearly defined and based on a well-articulated roadmap. So, how can this be achieved? How can such a distribution of roles be implemented?

The role of international actors should not be to control the reconstruction, but to facilitate it. Past interventions based on top-down approaches have led to crises of legitimacy and ultimately to unsustainable structures. This time, the role of the international community should be limited to three key areas:

- Providing financial resources and establishing transparent distribution mechanisms;
- Supporting local capacity through technical assistance and training programs;
- Ensuring accountability through neutral monitoring processes.

Unless the boundaries of external intervention are clearly defined, the reconstruction process risks creating new forms of dependency. Therefore, a balance must be struck between the normative framework and practical implementation.

The Tension Between Governance, Security, and Planning

When asking the question, “Why did the events in Gaza happen, and why did they result in such destruction?” the answers reveal the deep complexity and multi-layered nature of the situation. From this perspective, the reconstruction process is not only a physical undertaking, but also a political and security-driven issue—making it even more complex. Israel’s security concerns, border controls, and mobility restrictions directly affect both infrastructure development and the functionality of governance mechanisms. Therefore, the reconstruction process must be shaped not only through the tools of urban planning, but also through the coordinated efforts of diplomacy, legal frameworks, and security policy.

Priority Areas and Planning Strategies in the Reconstruction Process

In Gaza’s reconstruction process, housing, public services, and economic livelihoods are deeply interconnected core areas that must be addressed simultaneously. In the aftermath of the war, the housing issue has become one of the most urgent—and most complex—challenges. In a context where tens of thousands of buildings have been completely destroyed and many more rendered uninhabitable, the mere construction of temporary shelters will not suffice.

Past experiences have shown that temporary solutions, when not supported by adequate governance and resource allocation, tend to become long-term zones of stagnation—deepening social inequalities. Therefore, the planning of housing areas must go beyond addressing physical needs. It must be guided by a spatial justice-based approach that also considers social cohesion, equitable access to services, and safety.

Equally critical to housing is basic public services. In the aftermath of the war, Gaza has experienced a near-systemic collapse in healthcare, education, energy, and water infrastructure. The destruction of educational institutions has not only disrupted children’s pedagogical development but also severed their access to spaces of social solidarity and safety. The near-total dysfunction of hospitals has hindered access to emergency medical care and heightened the risk of outbreaks that threaten public health. The reconstruction of these

services must go beyond mere construction. It requires multi-dimensional strategies that prioritize accessibility, capacity building, human resource planning, and the integration of technological infrastructure—not just engineering solutions focused on rebuilding facilities.

Another crucial but often overlooked aspect of Gaza's reconstruction is the restoration of economic livelihoods and the reorganization of the labor market. In a setting where industrial facilities, commercial zones, and farmland have been damaged, people do not only need shelter—they need access to productive spaces where they can sustain their livelihoods. Therefore, the reconstruction process must be designed with employment generation as a central goal, which is vital for ensuring social stability. Policies that support local production networks, promote cooperative models, and enhance the participation of women and youth in production processes will not only drive economic recovery, but also reinforce social inclusion.

In conclusion, the post-war reconstruction of Gaza must aim not only to rebuild physical structures but also to restore human dignity, social solidarity, and the functionality of public space. This is far more than a technical engineering project; it must be rooted in a participatory, equitable, and long-term social recovery strategy.

Unless reconstruction is approached as a holistic process—one that integrates political reconciliation, social healing, and spatial justice—achieving lasting peace and stability in Gaza will remain out of reach.

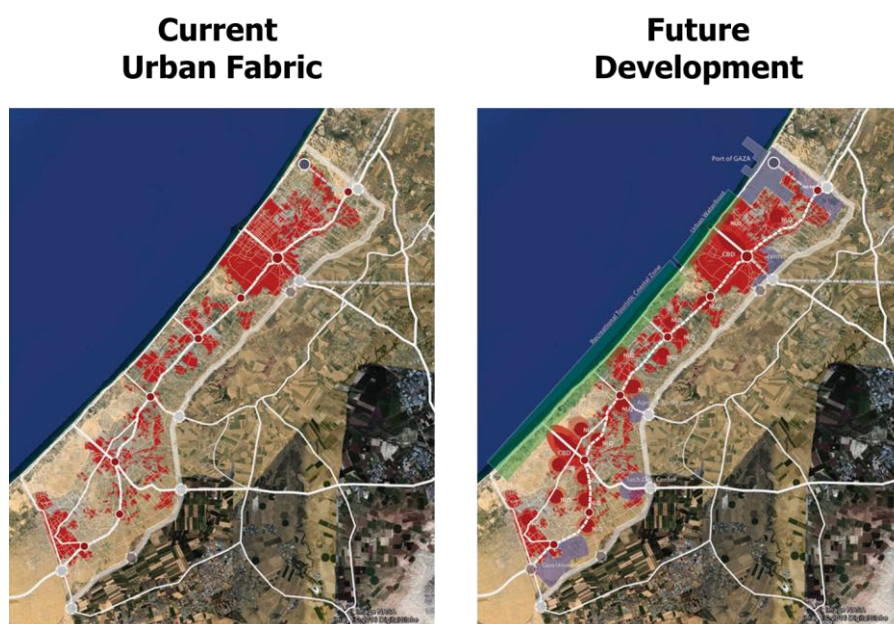
What Role Can Turkey Play?

The reconstruction of Gaza requires a holistic intervention—not only to address the physical destruction caused by war, but also to confront the governance vacuum, socio-economic fragmentation, and spatial injustice. Turkey is in a position to be one of the leading actors in this process, having both political legitimacy and technical and organisational capacity. However, this would require developing a strategic framework not focused on the past or present alone, but oriented toward “the day after”—toward the future.

Such a strategy must prioritize not only physical reconstruction, but also the establishment of a participatory governance mechanism that facilitates Palestinians' return to life. As emphasized in the RAND report, any post-war reconstruction system must not rely on externally imposed interventions that disregard local legitimacy, but rather on inclusive models that ensure the active involvement of the population. At this point, Turkey can offer a unique contribution, drawing on its past experiences and regional initiatives.

The Gaza Urban Project, initiated by TEPAV in 2016, is a noteworthy example in this regard. The goal of this project was to develop a strategic plan for Gaza based on spatial coherence, to integrate Turkey's construction and planning sectors into this vision, and to mobilize donor support through a portfolio of actionable, on-the-ground projects. That vision remains relevant today. To contribute effectively to the reconstruction process, Turkey should not rely solely on humanitarian aid. It must also develop a multi-layered strategy that includes urban planning, design, materials supply chains, and diplomatic mediation.

Figure 6: Sample visual from the 2016 TEPAV Gaza Urban Project study ⁴



Within this framework, the first step should be to design Gaza's reconstruction process as a two-phase model:

1. The establishment of a temporary and inclusive mechanism to restore governance capacity, and
2. The initiation of the physical and economic reconstruction process, grouped under the themes of reconstruction and economic recovery.

These two pillars should not be treated as separate tracks, but as mutually reinforcing processes. Turkey's previous field experience—such as in the Jenin Organized Industrial Zone (OSB) project and its engagements in Ramallah and Gaza—provides a foundation for managing this transition.

The reconstruction process must begin with a prioritization of needs. Any action on the ground without conducting an inventory of key areas—such as industrial zone infrastructure, agricultural production, energy supply, and healthcare and education facilities—would carry significant risk. Temporary field hospitals, schools, and shelters should be implemented as an immediate priority. Simultaneously, participatory planning meetings should be organized to guide the construction of permanent housing, public service buildings, and transportation networks. As proposed in 2016, these meetings can be supported through design competitions, local workshops, and stakeholder forums.

The reconstruction plan must go beyond physical building—it should also address property regimes at the urban scale, transparency in funding use, and the redesign of public space. At

⁴ This project was conducted in 2016 by Prof. Dr. Olgu Çalışkan (Middle East Technical University) at TEPAV.

this stage, revisiting models like **Solidere in Beirut** may offer valuable insights for addressing property uncertainties and establishing the legal planning framework.

Gaza's connectivity issue should not be addressed solely through technical means, but through political instruments as well. During talks with Israel, Turkey could offer constructive proposals to support the logistical infrastructure of reconstruction—such as establishing a portable port, utilizing nearby ports, and ensuring the security of material supply lines for transporting goods into and out of Gaza.

Turkey's construction sector has experience operating in multi-actor crisis environments, with the flexibility, speed, and organizational capability to build under challenging conditions. Turkish contractors' ability to execute projects under pressure, combined with public-private sector cooperation experience, provides tangible tools that could be actively applied to Gaza's reconstruction. The capacity of Turkish companies and institutions, the technical expertise of urban planners, and the private sector's interest in the region can collectively enhance both the technical adequacy and international legitimacy of the rebuilding process. Projects that are needs-based, field-informed, and adaptable offer Turkish actors a genuine opportunity to play a significant role.

Moreover, Turkey's regional accessibility and construction capacity represent strategic advantages. In particular, following the February 6, 2023 earthquakes, Turkey gained valuable experience in deploying temporary settlements, rapid construction, and infrastructure mobilization in its southeastern regions. This has greatly enhanced Turkey's ability to respond swiftly to large-scale, multi-stakeholder reconstruction efforts. Given that Turkey's logistics chains in the region are already active, and that equipment and workforce mobilization can be organized quickly, Turkey is uniquely positioned to be rapidly and technically integrated into the reconstruction process. This capability becomes even more significant considering the geographical distance and limited field presence of many developed countries—creating a strategic position for Turkey.

Conclusion

Following the war that began on October 7, 2023, Gaza has become the scene not only of physical devastation, but also of deep social, administrative, and spatial disintegration. This breakdown demands a multi-layered reconstruction process that goes beyond conventional post-war development frameworks. We now stand at a threshold where it is not only buildings that must be rebuilt, but also social trust, public services, governance mechanisms, and ultimately, the vision of living together. In this context, the reconstruction of Gaza is not merely a humanitarian relief effort or an infrastructure restoration project; it is fundamentally a political, social, and spatial vision for the future.

At the heart of the process must be the participation of local actors, the transparent and legitimate reconstruction of governance capacity, and the role of the international community as a facilitator—not a dominating force. Otherwise, every new structure built under the name of reconstruction may lay the groundwork for new forms of injustice and exclusion.

Urbanization, in particular, is not only about physical density or the distribution of services—it is also about how power and representation are spatially organized. For this reason, the spaces to be reimaged in Gaza have the potential to become either the carriers of a new social contract or zones where existing inequalities are reproduced.

Gaza's future depends both on internal efforts toward political reconciliation and on the genuine commitment of the international order. However, if the reconstruction process is carried out solely to serve the short-term stability goals of global actors, it will fail to establish either lasting peace or a sustainable living environment in the long run. What is needed today is a comprehensive reconstruction vision—one that bridges technical capacity with social justice, and aligns spatial planning with political representation. Only then can Gaza reclaim its potential to be not just a space of destruction, but a place of restorative justice and shared life.

In this context, beyond housing and service provision, the reconstruction of Gaza must be approached as a comprehensive urban reproduction challenge. Turkey has the capacity to contribute to this process not merely as a humanitarian aid provider, but as a multi-dimensional actor—offering expertise in governance models, participatory planning processes, and field-experienced construction firms. Initiatives such as the “Gaza Urban Project” launched in 2016 and the Jenin Organized Industrial Zone (OSB) experience have already demonstrated that Turkey can engage in such reconstruction efforts not only by supplying materials and labor, but also by shaping a vision and producing a technical framework.