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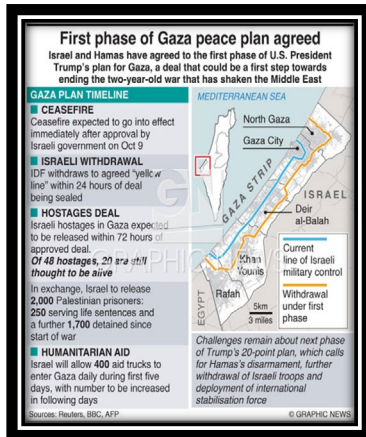
From Peace Plan to Power Struggle: The Battle for Postwar Gaza

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From Peace Plan to Power Struggle: The Battle for Postwar Gaza

On 29 September 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump unveiled his 20-point Gaza Peace Plan at the White House alongside Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, declaring it a “real roadmap to peace.” The plan’s stated objectives are to end the Gaza war, ensure Israel’s phased withdrawal, and establish a demilitarised, redeveloped Gaza under international supervision. At its core, the



proposal calls for the return of all 48 hostages—20 alive and 28 deceased—within 72 hours of Israel’s acceptance. In return, Israel would release 1,950 Palestinian prisoners, including 250 serving life sentences. The plan also guarantees the resumption of humanitarian aid, amnesty for combatants, and safe passage for Hamas members willing to commit to peaceful coexistence.

However, the plan bars Hamas and other armed factions from any direct governance role. Instead, Gaza’s administration and reconstruction would be managed by a temporary technocratic Palestinian committee under the oversight of an international “Board of Peace,” chaired personally by Trump. This body would supervise all political, security, and reconstruction initiatives. A Trump Economic Development Plan and creation of a special economic zone aim to drive Gaza’s recovery, job creation, and private investment. Security provisions form the backbone of the initiative. The plan mandates total demilitarisation of Gaza, verified by independent monitors, and deployment of an International Stabilisation Force composed of U.S., Arab, and international partners. The Israel Defence Forces would conduct a phased withdrawal, retaining only a security perimeter until Gaza is certified stable. The plan explicitly guarantees no forced displacement and promises a pathway to Palestinian self-determination and eventual statehood once the Palestinian Authority completes institutional reforms. In its final phase, the plan envisions a U.S.-facilitated political and inter-faith dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians aimed at “peaceful and prosperous coexistence.”

Following complex back-channel negotiations, a ceasefire came into effect on 10 October 2025. Both sides began taking initial steps toward compliance. Israeli forces commenced a partial withdrawal from the enclave, though they retained control over roughly 53 percent of Gaza. By 13 October, Hamas had released all 20 living hostages and the remains of four deceased individuals. However, the group failed to meet the full deadline to return all the bodies, prompting Israeli protests and a reduction of humanitarian aid through the Rafah crossing. Further tensions arose when Israel reported that one of the bodies returned was not among the original hostages, adding to the mistrust surrounding the fragile truce.

The U.S., however, defended Hamas’s partial compliance. On 15 October, a senior Trump adviser told reporters that delays were anticipated given “the extremely challenging conditions on the ground.” The official stressed that Hamas had “honoured the essential part of the deal” by returning all live hostages, and that the process of recovering the deceased would take more time. On 13 October, President Trump addressed the Israeli Knesset, proclaiming a “new dawn in the Middle East.” The following day, leaders and representatives from more than 30 countries gathered

in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, to discuss a long-term framework for Gaza's peace and reconstruction. The conference culminated in the signing of "The Trump Declaration for Enduring Peace and Prosperity" by Trump, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. Notably, Israel and Hamas were absent from the ceremony. The declaration nonetheless marked a major symbolic step, outlining international support for reconstruction, governance reforms, and security enforcement.

Yet optimism quickly gave way to renewed turmoil. Following Israel's partial withdrawal, Hamas fighters reasserted control over several parts of Gaza, sparking deadly clashes with rival factions and local militias. In Gaza City's al-Sabra neighbourhood, Hamas publicly executed eight blindfolded men accused of collaborating with Israel—an act condemned by the Palestinian Authority and human rights organisations. Elsewhere, fierce fighting erupted between Hamas security forces and the powerful Dughmush clan near the Jordanian Hospital in Tel al-Hawa, leaving 27 people dead, including 19 clan members and eight Hamas fighters. Residents fled amid heavy gunfire as Hamas deployed an estimated 7,000 security personnel to restore control across the enclave. Hamas claimed its actions targeted "outlaws and collaborators," but rival groups accused the organisation of using the violence to consolidate political control and suppress dissent.

Reacting to reports of the executions, President Trump said on 14 October that Hamas had "taken out a couple of gangs that were very bad," adding that "it didn't bother me much." However, he reiterated his demand for Hamas to disarm, warning that if the group failed to do so voluntarily, "we will disarm them, and it'll happen quickly and perhaps violently." Trump's remarks underscored the core challenge facing the peace plan: Hamas's reluctance to surrender its weapons remains the central obstacle to full implementation. While the hostage releases and ceasefire provided a brief respite from months of devastating conflict, the renewed intra-Gazan violence exposed the fragility of the emerging political order and the uncertain future of the Trump-led initiative.

As of mid-October 2025, the Gaza Peace Plan stands at a critical juncture—partially implemented but deeply contested. The success of Trump's initiative now hinges on whether the United States and its international partners can enforce demilitarisation, stabilise governance, and deliver tangible reconstruction without reigniting the cycle of violence that has long haunted Gaza.

From Patron to Adversary: The Shifting Dynamics of Pakistan–Afghanistan Relations

Ever since August 2021, when the Afghan Taliban captured Kabul, the trajectory of Pakistan–Afghanistan relations has witnessed a sharp downturn. This decline stemmed largely from Islamabad's heightened expectations of the new regime. Historically, Pakistan has sought a pliant government in Afghanistan that could help it realise its long-cherished goal of achieving "strategic depth" across its western frontier. However, unlike the Taliban 1.0 of the 1990s, the Taliban 2.0 has often resisted Pakistani overtures. Their divergence of interests have gradually widened

into open tensions, most notably over the presence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) on Afghan soil.

Pakistan accuses the Taliban-led Afghan government of providing safe haven, logistical support, and operational space to TTP militants, who continue to target Pakistani security forces and civilians, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Defence Minister Khawaja Asif recently acknowledged in Parliament that despite multiple rounds of negotiations and numerous delegation exchanges with Kabul, the bloodshed in Pakistan had not ceased. He lamented that Pakistan was “paying the price” for hosting nearly six million Afghan refugees for over six decades.

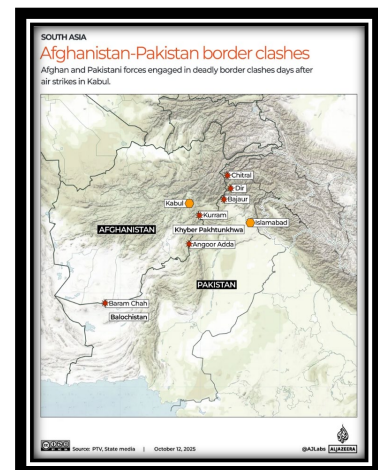
The TTP has indeed re-emerged as the most potent internal security challenge for Pakistan. Its affiliates and splinter groups mounted nearly 600 attacks against Pakistani forces in 2024 alone, and 2025 has witnessed an even sharper escalation in both frequency and intensity. Pakistan’s counterterror operations have yielded limited success while exacting a heavy toll in lives, resources, and public morale, particularly in the restive border regions.

For its part, Afghanistan has consistently rejected Pakistan’s allegations as baseless, asserting that the TTP issue is an “internal problem” for Islamabad to resolve. Kabul has resisted Pakistani pressure, including coercive measures such as the forced expulsion of large numbers of Afghan refugees. When diplomacy failed, Pakistan resorted to unilateral military action. On 9 October 2025, it launched a coordinated assault targeting alleged TTP hideouts deep inside Afghan territory. Explosions were reported in Paktika province and even in parts of Kabul. Islamabad, however, maintained strategic ambiguity, neither confirming nor denying its involvement.

The airstrikes, aimed at eliminating TTP chief Noor Wali Mehsud, triggered a social media frenzy in Pakistan, with unverified claims of his death circulating widely. Kabul condemned the strikes as an “unprovoked violation” of its sovereignty — the most significant cross-border military action in Afghanistan since the U.S. drone strike that killed Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in 2022.

In retaliation, Afghan forces reportedly inflicted heavy losses on Pakistani positions along the mountainous border on the night of 10–11 October, claiming to have killed nearly sixty Pakistani soldiers. Islamabad countered these assertions, admitting the loss of 23 personnel but insisting that over 200 “Taliban and affiliated terrorists” had been neutralised. The situation deteriorated further on the night of 14–15 October, when intense clashes broke out again, leading to dozens of casualties on both sides. These confrontations mark one of the fiercest Pakistan–Afghanistan military exchanges in recent memory.

While there is no parity between the two militaries, the Taliban’s combat experience and determination to defend Afghan sovereignty render any military adventure by Pakistan fraught with peril. The timing of these clashes is particularly significant — they coincided with Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi’s six-day visit to India. Many observers believe that Pakistan’s strikes were intended as a geopolitical



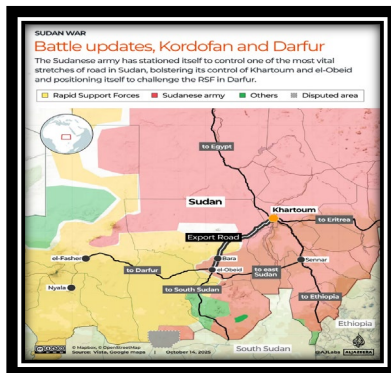
warning to Kabul: that drawing closer to New Delhi could entail strategic consequences.

In a region already plagued by volatility, Pakistan's confrontation with Afghanistan risks opening a new front of instability. The timing could not be worse — just as international stakeholders were cautiously re-engaging Kabul to promote peace, stability, and economic recovery. Continued hostilities could isolate both nations further, undermine regional cooperation, and embolden militant networks. For Pakistan in particular, unilateral military action may prove counterproductive — alienating the Afghan leadership, eroding trust, and inadvertently fuelling sympathy for the TTP among segments of the Afghan populace.

Sudan's Endless War: Power Struggles, Proxy Interests, and a Nation on the Brink

Since April 2023, Sudan has been engulfed in a brutal civil war between two rival factions of its military government—the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), commanded by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, popularly known as Hemedti. What began as a political disagreement over the distribution of power and control of Sudan's vast natural resources, especially gold, has devolved into a devastating conflict that has displaced millions and destabilized the wider Horn of Africa.

As of October 16, 2025, Sudan's civil war has intensified, particularly in the western region of Darfur. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have escalated their siege of El Fasher, the last major stronghold of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) in Darfur. This prolonged siege has led to severe humanitarian consequences for the approximately 260,000 civilians trapped in the city.



Two and a half years into the fighting, the conflict shows no sign of abating. Both sides remain entrenched in a protracted struggle for dominance, with neither achieving decisive advantage. Ironically, the same two men now fighting for supremacy had once been allies.

In 2018, Burhan and Hemedti cooperated to depose Sudan's long-time dictator, Omar al-Bashir, ending his three-decade Islamist regime. Their alliance ushered in

a brief period of hope as a civilian-led transitional government was established through a power-sharing arrangement between the military and civilian leaders. The roadmap envisioned a gradual transition toward democratic rule.

By late 2022, as talks began to formalize a new power-sharing deal, the fragile coalition started to unravel. Key points of contention included Hemedti's demand to be elevated to Burhan's equal and the contentious issue of integrating RSF forces into the regular army. The lack of a clear timeline for such integration deepened the divide.

Diplomatic efforts have since multiplied but to little effect. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Ethiopia have hosted numerous rounds of talks, while the African Union (AU) and United Nations (UN) continue to press for a ceasefire and humanitarian corridors.

Despite these initiatives, each attempt at peace has crumbled under mutual suspicion and renewed violence.

Since losing control of the capital, Khartoum, in March 2025, the SAF has been locked in fierce fighting to prevent the RSF from taking el-Fasher, the army's last major stronghold in western Darfur. The battle for el-Fasher has triggered mass displacement, forcing tens of thousands to flee across borders and worsening an already catastrophic humanitarian crisis.

Both factions have employed increasingly brutal tactics. Urban warfare, aerial bombardments, and indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas have become commonplace. Infrastructure—including hospitals, schools, and markets—has been reduced to rubble. The RSF now controls large portions of western Sudan, while the SAF clings to government institutions and key strategic sites. Ceasefire agreements, often mediated by foreign powers, have repeatedly collapsed within days.

In parallel, the conflict's political dimension has deepened. In May 2025, Burhan appointed Kamil Idriss as civilian prime minister in a bid to project legitimacy, while the RSF-led "Tasis coalition" announced a rival "parallel government" in Darfur two months later. These duelling administrations have entrenched the division, signalling the emergence of a de facto partitioned Sudan.

Perhaps the most alarming development has been the accelerating influx of foreign-supplied weaponry. Both sides have acquired increasingly sophisticated arms, including advanced drones, counter-drone systems, and surface-to-air missiles. The RSF has deployed suicide drones and modified quadcopters carrying mortar shells, reminiscent of tactics used by Yemen's Houthi rebels. Investigations into the origin of some munitions—allegedly linked to the UAE's Armed Forces Joint Logistics Command—prompted the Sudanese government to file a case at the International Court of Justice accusing the UAE of "complicity in genocide" and to sever diplomatic ties. Abu Dhabi has categorically denied the allegations.

The UAE's purported involvement reflects a broader pattern of external interference that has amplified the conflict's complexity. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, and Iran have each lent support—directly or indirectly—to rival factions, seeking to advance their own strategic interests. Russia's Wagner Group, now operating as the "Africa Corps," has also been implicated in supplying mercenaries and mining expertise to the RSF in exchange for access to Sudan's gold reserves.

This influx of foreign weaponry has transformed Sudan's war into one of the most technologically advanced internal conflicts in Africa's history. It also underscores a dangerous trend—the growing capacity of non-state actors to wage long-range, high-tech warfare, destabilizing entire regions. The proliferation of armed drones and precision munitions among paramilitaries risks turning Sudan into a testing ground for proxy warfare.

Despite the mounting humanitarian catastrophe, international engagement remains largely rhetorical. Appeals for ceasefires and aid corridors have gone unanswered, while sanctions and arms embargoes have proven ineffective. The war in Sudan is no longer a localized power struggle; it is a mirror of the world's geopolitical fragmentation.