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PALESTINE ECONOMIC POLICY  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE (MAS)

# Policy Brief

**Issue (8)**

## **Critical Reading of “Disaster Capitalism” Plans for the Gaza Strip**

The Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) regularly publishes applied and scientific studies, in addition to brief research papers, as part of an annual series of roundtable sessions on important economic topics of interest to the public and decision-makers. The policy briefs outline the key recommendations of selected scholastic activities, in order to disseminate this information and maximize the benefits derived from this series of sessions.

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**Critical Reading of “Disaster Capitalism” Plans for the Gaza Strip**

Prepared by: Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS)

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## 1. Background

International media has [recently reported](#) a USA administration vision for the post-war reconstruction of Gaza Strip, a blueprint whose exact origins and authorship remains unclear. While the reported plan entails ethnic cleansing on a massive, organised and funded scale, many of its financial, economic and governance features can be traced to three “plans” published over the past year by Israeli, US and Arab “think-tanks” and purported planning experts. As documented in a recent MAS report and discussed in a Study Day in July of this year, these and other proposals that have been floated from global sources are accurately grouped under the rubric of “disaster capitalist” schemes, comprehensively analyzed in an [article](#) by scholars Nur Arafah and Mandy Turner. These schemes leverage collapse as an opportunity to restructure politics and the economy according to standards that do not serve the local population. The Director-General of MAS commented that “these have been applied in different global neo-colonial experiences, most recently under the US imposed “Bremer” Transitional Authority in Iraq, with a similar governance model under Tony Blair being mulled by hostile powers for the Gaza Strip.”

From a first reading of the recent document, which appears to have drawn on a number of previously published plans, Khalidi commented that it “includes the Israeli Prime Minister’s hallucinatory vision for an Israeli controlled Gaza Strip and two other such schemes, which essentially rely on expropriating and ethnically cleansing the Gaza Strip under supervision of an international financial consortium, treating this inseparable part of Palestine and its 2 million people as fair game for such rapacious and predatory financial imperatives.”

MAS republishes here for the public interest, the sections of its report on two of the preceding plans that inform and shape the more encompassing document presented this week, which analyses each of them according to a systematic methodology:

- A proposal by a US academic, taken up in 2024 by Jared Kushner (Trump’s son-in-law) and apparently the basis for the first proposal made by Trump in February 2025 regarding the US “taking over” Gaza Strip
- A similar proposal prepared by a UAE research centre which envisages a Gaza Strip owned and managed for 50 years by an international financial consortium and affiliated powers.

To download the full report published by MAS on Reconstruction Plans follow this link.

<https://mas.ps/en/publications/12969.html>

## 2. Trump–Pelzman Plan: “Gaza Riviera”

The “Economic Plan for the Reconstruction of Gaza: A Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) Approach, widely known to have inspired the “Gaza Riviera Plan” or the “Trump Plan,” is one of the most ambitious and controversial proposals presented in the context of the “day after” Gaza war. The plan was developed by Professor Joseph Pelzman of George Washington University and Director of CEES-MENA Inc. It appears to form the technical basis for the extreme Trump proposal for

the USA to “own” and rebuild the Strip, after removing its population (though the ethnic cleansing idea was not in the plan document, and was reportedly added by Jared Kushner who first coined the Riviera concept). It proposes a 50-year BOT model, rooted in a purely capitalist investment logic that treats Gaza as an open experimental space for economic restructuring through market tools—entirely detached from political or sovereign tracks. On the contrary, it actively deconstructs the political dimension of reconstruction, reframing it as service management.

The plan begins with a highly appealing marketing vision that emphasizes opportunity and development, promising to transform Gaza from a devastated area into a global investment destination through a series of mega-projects described as “erasure and comprehensive rebuilding.” These include infrastructure, economic systems, governance models, and even urban culture. The term “Gaza Riviera” stems from its vision of converting Gaza’s coastal front into something resembling a European Riviera through luxury tourism projects.

## 2.1 Vision and Objectives

- **Central Vision:** Transform Gaza into a green, demilitarized, and self-sufficient economy based on an advanced, transparent market model, while deferring political sovereignty until after the operational period ends.
- **Political Objectives:** Establish the “rule of law” based on the Anglo-Saxon Common Law system, encompassing property rights, contracts, criminal law, and compensation mechanisms.
- **Economic Objectives:** Develop a triple-sector economy focusing on tourism, agriculture, and technology, aiming to achieve food security by reviving local agriculture.
- **Spatial Objectives:** Construct high-density residential complexes modeled after “Chinese housing towers,” with modern infrastructure such as light rail, green ports and airports, and the elimination of private vehicles in favor of advanced public transport.

## Execution and Governance Model

- **Implementing Entities:** International and regional investors become equity partners in Gaza’s economy for 50 years and handle civil management through subcontracted firms.
- **Civil Administration:** Managed by private entities chosen by the investors, based on the principle of “the private sector delivers public services.”
- **Governance Mechanisms:** A full-fledged e-Government system with a legal and economic environment conducive to investment.
- **Financing Model:** Investment is the primary funding source. Investing states own shares in public assets. The Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) model is used to guide economic policy.

## Three Phases of Implementation

- **Foundational Phase (0–3 years):** Rubble removal, establishment of core infrastructure, legal and commercial environment setup, and creation of the operating authority.
- **Operational Phase (4–15 years):** Launch of major economic projects, enforcement of new governance frameworks, and beginning of capital return for investors.

- Transfer Phase (after 50 years): Assets and infrastructure are to be handed over to a Palestinian entity—conditional on meeting vague and externally assessed criteria of “efficiency and transparency.”

### **Position of Palestinians in the Plan**

- Political Status: Palestinians are viewed as residents, not citizens, with sovereignty deferred until the contract ends.
- Expected Roles: Palestinians would benefit from updated education and job opportunities in the three main sectors, in addition to enhanced freedom of movement.
- Local Administration: Virtually absent, with governance delegated to foreign entities, and no role assigned to the Palestinian Authority or other Palestinian political actors.

### **Security and Political Assumptions**

- Assumed Context: Post-war Gaza, following the defeat or neutralization of Hamas and the absence of armed resistance.
- Security Setup: Assumes a demilitarized Gaza, with no specific security arrangements mentioned, and relies implicitly on Israeli and regional acceptance of the model.
- Regional Cooperation: Draws on educational and administrative models from Gulf countries (UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia) as templates for modernization and institutional reform.

### **Narrative and Language of the Plan**

- Core Narrative: Gaza’s economic failure is due to a lack of modern management, which can be solved through investment and law enforcement—a narrative that bypasses political dimensions.
- Discourse Frame: Technocratic, economic, and politically non-confrontational; promotes market-based solutions while masking explicit political agendas.

According to the plan, the cost of rebuilding Gaza would range between \$1–2 trillion USD, with an implementation timeline of 5 to 10 years. It includes the construction of an airport, seaport, power station, desalination plant, and the development of tourism, agriculture, and high-tech sectors. Investors would receive usufruct rights for 50 years.

In short, the plan exemplifies “disaster capitalism”—leveraging collapse as an opportunity to restructure politics and the economy according to standards that do not serve the local population. Instead, it redirects Gaza into global market networks and redefines Palestinians as minor investors in their own homeland. It proposes reconstruction without reclaiming the cause, development without liberation—making it seductive in appearance but politically hazardous in content. It calls for serious political scrutiny before any adoption or implementation.

Notably, the plan treats Gaza as a separate case, disconnected from the West Bank and the broader Palestinian national project.

## 2.2 Critical Reading of the Plan

At first glance, the Trump–Pelzman Plan appears ambitious and alluring—articulated in a glossy language promising unprecedented opportunities, a transformative leap forward, and the deployment of smart technologies and economies in the reconstruction process. However, a closer reading of its narrative structure and institutional content reveals deep-rooted neoliberal biases at its core, alongside a quiet political engineering project that replaces Gaza’s political and social struggle with the logic of the market. The plan erases the occupation and reduces Palestinians to “efficient users” or “silent investors” in a project over which they have no control.

The plan doesn’t merely marginalize the political dimension—it strips it entirely from the reconstruction agenda, redefining Gaza not as a territory in need of liberation or decolonization, but as a site requiring “good management.” Thus, reconstruction is reframed not as a sovereign act but as a commercial service, managed through digital governance tools and commercial contracts—treating the rebuilding of an occupied land as if it could occur independently of freedom, dignity, or justice.

This plan exemplifies what is widely known as disaster capitalism, where the moment of collapse and extreme humanitarian need is leveraged as a market entry point for capital, enabling the restructuring of the economy around profit and the creation of “emerging markets” atop the ruins of a devastated society. It transforms crisis from a political tragedy into an investment opportunity, and Gaza from a space of resistance into an experimental playground for market-based policies.

The proposal to establish an investment entity with operational control over the Gaza Strip for 50 years, under a foreign legal framework, essentially strips Palestinians of any legal or regulatory sovereignty over their land. Instead of being treated as citizens with rights, Palestinians are recast as “beneficiaries” or “clients,” expected to conform to the proposed infrastructure and prove their efficiency and discipline to ensure continued inclusion. In doing so, the plan empties the relationship between people and land of its historical and political substance, reducing it to a service-based transaction subject to external evaluation and potential cancellation.

The plan promotes luxury coastal developments, special economic zones, resorts, and yacht marinas—all designed to attract foreign or elite Palestinian capital. However, it fails to address how it will deal with refugees, camps, or destroyed neighborhoods. It offers no vision for reintegrating marginalized or displaced communities into the new economic fabric. Instead, it presents a blueprint for producing a deeply classed city, where the poor are pushed aside, and neighborhoods are redefined based on investment attractiveness.

Implementation is conditioned on security and administrative coordination with Israel, including movement arrangements via crossings managed in cooperation with the occupying power. The plan proposes no vision for lifting the blockade or securing Palestinian control over borders. Rather, it adapts to the current status quo, treating it as a neutral fact rather than an unjust condition to be challenged. This amounts to a structural normalization of the occupation, stripping the Palestinian cause of its liberatory essence.

In short, this is a reconstruction vision without memory, development without sovereignty, and modernity without freedom. It constitutes a structural extension of the logic of neo-colonialism, only this time dressed in a polished investment suit.

### 3. Al Habtoor Plan

The plan developed by the Al Habtoor Research Center (based in the United Arab Emirates) presents a comprehensive vision for Gaza's reconstruction, going beyond traditional relief frameworks to propose a reconfiguration of the economic sphere and governance structures through a developmental-investment approach with a regional character. The initiative seeks to gradually disengage Gaza from economic dependency on Israel and horizontally integrate it into Arab economic networks, driven by Gulf capital and implemented through private sector-led mechanisms and strategic alliances.

The initiative's vision revolves around achieving a structural transformation of Gaza—from a state of chronic fragility to a flexible and sustainable economic-civil model—through three interlinked tracks:

- Gradual economic independence from Israel, by establishing local productive sectors in energy, water, infrastructure, and manufacturing.
- Effective governance based on transparency and accountability, led by gradually empowered Palestinian institutions, framed by anti-corruption laws and civil oversight of the security sector.
- Arab regional integration, through trade agreements with Egypt and Jordan to enable exports and imports, breaking the logic of geographical and economic isolation.
- The plan is presented as a strategic alternative to what it calls “cycles of repeated failure,” relying on Arab investments led by sovereign or semi-sovereign companies and institutions, under both international and local technocratic supervision.

The initiative adopts an advanced spatial planning vision based on a “smart reconstruction” model, including:

- Temporary and sustainable housing: Prefabricated housing units built from war rubble and assembled rapidly in the south of Gaza, providing environmentally sensitive temporary shelter while creating local job opportunities.
- Specialized industrial zones: Targeting the production of essential goods, renewable energy, and select manufacturing sectors, located in pre-planned areas to reduce land disputes and ensure urban-economic integration.
- Gradual infrastructure development: Including road networks, solar energy stations, water desalination plants, and smart sewage systems, to be implemented in three phases over 18–60 months, ranging from urgent repairs to structural solutions.

The governance framework of the plan is based on a three-stage structure:

1. Preparatory phase: Establishing civil local councils, anti-corruption mechanisms, and transparency systems.
2. Capacity-building phase: Training staff, reforming the judiciary, and activating financial oversight and administrative auditing.
3. Transfer of authority phase: Gradual handover of project management to Palestinian institutions, conditional upon institutional readiness.

While the initiative emphasizes the “Palestinian” nature of governance, it constrains this transition with a set of prerequisites, keeping decision-making in the hands of international and Arab partners during the initial stages.

The plan also includes the formation of a regionally led investment holding company, with 70% ownership by Palestinian and Arab investors (including sovereign funds and diaspora), and 30% by foreign investors. This company will serve as a financing and implementation vehicle, managing investments in infrastructure, energy, industry, and financial services.

### **Implementation mechanisms rely on:**

- Public-private partnerships (PPPs).
- A clear timeline, beginning with relief, then smart construction, and finally institutional transformation.
- Administrative technology, including digital tracking systems, performance indicators, and digital transparency tools.

The plan stresses the importance of “Palestinian leadership” in implementation, symbolized by locating the company’s headquarters in Rafah and calling for the empowerment of national institutions. However, this role is simultaneously constrained by discourse around “institutional maturity” and “readiness,” making sovereignty conditional and its transfer delayed within the logic of a “prolonged transition.”

### **Despite its operational depth, the plan faces several key issues:**

- Deliberate omission of the occupation: The plan does not address the Israeli blockade or the problem of border crossings, keeping these critical matters outside the narrative—as if the core issue were a lack of development rather than a lack of freedom.
- Depoliticization: Reconstruction is presented as a tool for stability without addressing the root political causes of the crisis, thereby reproducing the same logic of “rebuilding instead of liberation.”
- Private sector dominance: The plan promotes a corporate-owned economy that could marginalize local actors and civil society, reduce the public interest and services to privatized income generators, reconfiguring Gaza more as a special economic zone than a national-political entity.
- Horizontal vision without national depth: While the plan reintegrates Gaza into the Arab market, it does not necessarily reintegrate it into the Palestinian political body, leaving national unity postponed.

It is also worth noting that the plan includes the deployment of international monitors and peacekeeping forces. These teams will be stationed at key checkpoints and construction sites to monitor the movement of individuals and materials, ensuring that dual-use materials are not diverted for military purposes. They will be equipped with communication tools and real-time reporting systems to flag any violations or potential threats, in order to ensure the safety of reconstruction operations.

### 3.1 Critical Reading of the Plan

At first glance, the Al Habtoor Plan for the Reconstruction of Gaza appears to be one of the most meticulously designed plans in terms of engineering details, timelines, and financial partnerships. However, at its core, it reproduces a developmental model stripped of politics and charged with a neoliberal-regional vision aimed at the flexible control of the Gaza Strip. This means the plan does not emerge from a context of resistance or colonial accountability, but rather from a moment of collapse in which disaster is transformed into an investment opportunity, and rubble becomes a marketable construction resource.

What distinguishes the initiative most is its dismantling of the state as a sovereign economic actor, replacing it with a “Palestinian–Arab–International” holding company—a supra-political structure that transcends the state and reconfigures the economy as a domain for capital flows, not as an expression of a liberation project. In this model, Gaza becomes more of an “investment zone” than a political arena, where decision-making is reshaped through tools of financing, planning, and reporting—not through political representation or community dialogue.

Despite all the references to “Palestinian leadership” and “local ownership,” the plan frames sovereignty as a “reward” conditional on technical competence and administrative compliance. The Palestinian, in this plan, is not a full actor, but one whose sovereign maturity is staged according to performance indicators. This type of “deferred sovereignty” subjects political decision-making to the authority of metrics and international oversight, turning Gaza into a testing ground for the Palestinian capacity to “self-manage” before being granted the right to self-determination.

The initiative almost entirely ignores the Israeli colonial actor: there is no reference to border crossings, the blockade, Israel’s role in obstructing reconstruction, or the tools of remote control. As such, the plan produces a condition of reconstruction without context, development without conflict, and governance without colonialism. This omission does not simply reflect absence but reveals an ideological intent to depoliticize reconstruction and replace it with terms like “innovation,” “investment,” and “entrepreneurship,” as if Gaza’s crisis stems from a lack of markets rather than the persistence of occupation.

The plan’s discourse on transparency, governance, and oversight—though legitimate at the administrative level—is used in this context as a tool to control politics under the guise of management. The plan organizes political space not through representation but through financial and technical evaluation. This opens the door to a model of economic discipline that legitimizes political exclusion, where there is no room for factions, national dialogue, or even civil society—only executive-investment networks deciding from above.

The initiative positions Gaza within a network of Arab commercial and investment relations (Egypt, Jordan, the Gulf), but without effectively linking it to the unity of the Palestinian national project. This suggests a reorientation of Gaza horizontally within Arab markets rather than vertically within the Palestinian political body, foreshadowing a reproduction of the “Gaza First” project—this time in an economic-developmental form, where the priority becomes the stabilization of financial flow networks, not the revival of a unified political vision.

In short, it is a plan to reconstruct the Strip, but not to rebuild the cause. And while the plan may seem appealing in its details, it carries within it a reproduction of domination through soft means—removing politics from reconstruction and confining the Palestinian to the role of a “good recipient,” who must prove competence before being granted the right to decide—and the right to self-determination.