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Shrinking reconstruction space in the Gaza Strip: rebuilding after the 2021 and 2022 wars

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a comprehensive analysis of the reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip following the 2021 and 2022 wars, placing these efforts in the context of previous reconstruction experiences after the 2008/09, 2012, and 2014 conflicts. Employing a mixed-methods approach that includes interviews, primary data analysis, and policy document reviews, the study uncovers the dynamics and challenges shaping the recent reconstruction processes. A key finding of this research is the marked slowdown and ineffectiveness of the post-2021 reconstruction, contrasting with earlier efforts. Unlike previous rounds where material flow restrictions due to the blockade were the predominant hindrance, the study identifies a critical shift in the recent context: a significant lack of funds emerged as the primary obstacle. This change reflects evolving political, economic, and security landscapes in the region, including donor fatigue and shifting international priorities. The paper explores continuities and discontinuities in the factors influencing reconstruction outcomes in Gaza, offering a nuanced understanding of how the changing context has impacted rebuilding efforts. It examines the implications of these findings for future reconstruction initiatives in Gaza and similar conflict-affected regions, providing insights into the complex interplay of financial, political, and logistical challenges in post-conflict reconstruction.

KEYWORDS

Gaza; Palestine; post-conflict reconstruction; Hamas; Israel; development planning

Introduction

In 2022, the blockaded Gaza Strip was subjected to its fifth war since 2008, and with each round, rehabilitation and reconstruction of damaged buildings and infrastructure proceeded despite the widely shared expectation that further rounds of armed conflict would ensue. Yet, following the 2021 and 2022 wars, a distinct change occurred in the context of post-conflict reconstruction in the Gaza Strip. This article analyses the rebuilding of Gaza in the post-2021 and post-2022 war periods, charting the continuities and discontinuities that explain the changing patterns and trends in the reconstruction process.

The paper contributes towards the gap in research on the 2021 and 2022 wars in Gaza and their aftermath. The existing research on those wars largely focuses on the strategic

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and military dimensions, including the mass mobilisation and conditions for a Gazan military front,[1] analysis of Palestinian armed forces,[2] and the strategic decision-making of the Israeli military during asymmetric warfare.[3] There is also a small, yet valuable, body of literature on rebuilding Gaza after the wars of 2008/09, 2012, and 2014.[4]

However, the number of academic studies focused on rehabilitation and reconstruction following the 2021 and 2022 wars is limited. One study analyses the parties of the conflict within the 11-day war of 2021,[5] whilst several policy and media reports collate data on rebuilding, in particular one year after the 2021 war and the first month after the 2022 war.[6] There is also valuable research in Arabic that mainly focuses on analysing the changing politics of Gaza's reconstruction, including studies on the politics of the multi-actor driven reconstruction process,[7] the importance of holding Israel responsible for reconstruction,[8] and Egypt's political strategy that isolated Hamas from the rebuilding process and involved Israel directly.[9]

This paper begins by presenting the empirical contribution of the paper in terms of research on the Gaza Strip and post-conflict reconstruction in the contemporary Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The paper then offers a brief contextualisation of the Gaza Strip, indicating major features such as blockade and occupation, in addition to a summary of research findings on factors shaping reconstruction in Gaza after the three wars prior to 2021. The following section then presents a stylised overview of the impact of the 2021 and 2022 wars on Gaza in terms of the human impact, infrastructural damage, and economic effects. The research also includes an empirical assessment of the reconstruction process after the 2021 and 2022 wars. The analysis focuses on two sets of factors – those that explain reconstruction trends prior to 2021, and the new explanatory variables in the complex dynamics of the post-2021 phase marked by a new Israeli government, a greater role for Egypt, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine. Research for the paper was completed prior to the 2023 war, which is beyond the purview of this analysis. The conclusion states the key findings of the analysis in addition to indicating priorities for future research on the cycle of destruction and rebuilding in the Gaza Strip.

The research for this paper utilises various primary and secondary data collection methods. Firstly, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted by the co-authors in Arabic, which were then transcribed and translated into English. Interviewees included a range of officials, experts, and practitioners involved in reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip. A purposive sampling method was applied due to the specialised nature of the subject and the small population of individuals engaged professionally in the reconstruction process. Secondly, information requests were sent to governmental organisations in Gaza and Ramallah with some official data incorporated into the analysis. Thirdly, official statements on foreign aid and rebuilding progress were monitored in media sources in both English and Arabic. Finally, a desk-review of available secondary sources was conducted, which included academic and policy research analysis as well as an examination of high-quality journalistic reports.

Research framework and contribution

The article makes a research contribution towards several areas of knowledge. Firstly, it provides in-depth empirical research on humanitarian and development policy in the

Gaza Strip. The primary focus of research on the Gaza Strip since 2007 has been on Hamas as a non-state military, political, and governance actor in terms of its behaviour and strategies.[10] Another major strand of research examines Israeli attacks on Gaza, including the doctrinal and tactical shifts in various Israeli military operations and wars,[11] the applicability of normative frames along with the Responsibility to Protect (R2P),[12] and justificatory practices of 'ethical killing' by the Israeli military.[13] Existing research also analyses humanitarian assistance and protection in the Gaza Strip, including studies on refugee policy and practice in the Gaza Strip,[14] and the widespread destruction of infrastructure.[15]

Existing literature also discusses the politics of aid to Palestine. This strand of research highlights the highly politicised nature of aid and assistance of Palestine, which is often differentiated by recipient – the Palestinian Authority-controlled West Bank and the Hamas-dominated Gaza Strip. This paradigm is crucial to the understanding of post-conflict reconstruction, especially in the case of the Gaza Strip where aid is heavily politicised and securitised. This paper contributes to this literature, by contextualising the politics of aid within the discussion of post-conflict reconstruction in the Gaza Strip.

There is existing literature on the necessarily political nature of aid in the Palestinian context, particularly on the way that aid becomes intertwined with conflict and peace[16] and the dilemmas surrounding aid engagement with the Gaza Strip under *de facto* Hamas rule.[17] Within this body of literature, there is a strand of research that critiques the very use of aid to Palestine altogether vis-à-vis its argued reinforcement of Israeli occupation.[18] There is also research that analyses the patterns of aid within the paradigm of the post-Oslo era[19] and the different modalities adopted by different aid donors, including in a comparative context between Gulf and Western donors.[20]

The paper further contributes towards a smaller body of research that focuses on post-conflict reconstruction in the Gaza Strip. One strand of research on Gaza's reconstruction applies a sectoral approach, including studies on post-disaster housing reconstruction,[21] water sector recovery under the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM),[22] and challenges of health system rebuilding under blockade.[23] Research also examines neglected and marginalised groups in Gaza's post-conflict processes, including studies on the role of youth in post-conflict reconstruction[24] and the international aid regime and women's empowerment.[25] Similar concerns are reflected in research on the 'architecture of the everyday'[26] and the 'architecture of hope'[27] that interrogates the possibilities of empowering marginalised communities in Gaza through an ideal model of post-conflict reconstruction.

Several studies provide insight into the long-term factors influencing the pace and scale of reconstruction under the restrictive environment imposed by the blockade of the Gaza Strip since 2007.[28] The temporal focus of this previous research is on rebuilding Gaza primarily in the periods following the 2008/09, 2012, and 2014 wars. Research examining the 2021 war on Gaza has been largely insufficient – with a few exceptions addressing military actions with no academic studies investigating the post-2021 rebuilding process.[29] This paper contributes towards this body of knowledge through an examination of the post-2021 and post-2022 phase of Gaza's 'post-conflict' reconstruction trajectory.

The importance of the study is particularly grounded in the 2021 war, which occurred in a significantly changed context than that of the previous wars. Previous research has

analysed reconstruction after these wars in terms of various factors. One set of factors focuses on the spatial restrictions imposed under the blockade and the bureaucratic procedures introduced to govern the reconstruction process since 2014.[30] Another set of factors identifies the role of donor behaviour including overall funding levels, programming modalities, and issues of donor coordination.[31] Finally, political factors also figure in several explanatory accounts, including intra-Palestinian divisions, the challenges of the 'no-contact policy' that sidelines Hamas, and the lack of ownership entailed by the near-absence of civil society participation within Gaza in reconstruction design, planning, or implementation.[32] These findings are applied in this paper as the basis of a conceptual framework in addition to the new sets of conjunctural factors related to the changing roles of external actors and exogenous shocks, such as the Ukraine crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Secondly, the paper advances contemporary understanding of post-conflict reconstruction within the context of the MENA region. Much research on post-conflict reconstruction and development in the MENA region has been conducted on single-country case studies, such as post-2003 Iraq,[33] Lebanon after the civil war,[34] and Lebanon after the July 2006 war.[35] These studies analyse issues related to reconstruction in cases that occurred prior to the Arab Spring of 2011 and subsequent wave of civil unrest, armed conflicts, and regional instability.

Since the onset of the Arab Spring, however, the MENA region was primarily responsible for the upturn in the level of conflict globally.[36] In this period, academic and policy attention towards conflict in the region was largely focused on ending the wars in Syria, Libya, and Yemen in addition to carrying out the trans-national campaign to destroy the Islamic State.[37] Thus, between 2010 and 2020, the MENA region was not a fertile ground for implementing large-scale ambitious projects of post-conflict reconstruction. Yet, during the 2010s and whilst it was blockaded and subjected to repeated wars, the Gaza Strip remained one of the only contexts within the MENA region in which reconstruction efforts were proceeding at scale. Whilst the Gaza Strip has been labelled as an 'exceptional' case, this positionality entails that its experience with rebuilding from 2008/09 up until 2022 constitutes one of the most important elements of the empirical record of reconstruction within the MENA region in that time frame.

The analysis advances the growing body of research that addresses the limitations and potentialities of post-conflict reconstruction in the contemporary context of the MENA region. Whilst reconstruction was not a major consideration during the early Arab Spring period, by the late 2010s there was a rekindling of interest in issues related to post-conflict reconstruction and development in the region. Various developments including the 2022 ceasefires in Yemen and the slow normalisation with the Assad regime together produced a shift towards longer term thinking about early recovery and reconstruction. This paper thus contributes towards the growing research paradigm on rethinking the scope for reconstruction in the changing MENA region going forward.

Context of the Gaza Strip

The Gaza Strip is a coastal territory inhabited by over two million Palestinians that has been subjected to decades of occupation, blockade, and dozens of military operations. Gaza was under formal military occupation from 1967 until 2005, when Israel withdrew

its forces and settlers.[38] After Hamas seized outright control of Gaza in 2007, Israel imposed a tight air, land, and sea blockade that severely restricted the movement of people and resources to and from the Strip.[39] The blockade has also produced an unusual post-occupation context in which Israel exercises direct control over many facets of life in Gaza through border controls and other tools rather than through forces stationed in the territory.[40]

The long-term effects of the blockade have been devastating. Gaza's links to the rest of Palestine and the world were severed, triggering a collapse in the local economy and a reversal of progress on key development indicators. In Gaza, more than 60 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line, the unemployment rate is greater than 50 per cent, and 53 per cent of Gazans were food insecure with more than 80 per cent dependent upon aid.[41] The total economic cost of one decade of occupation in the Gaza Strip stood at USD 16.7 billion in 2020,[42] whilst GDP per capita declined from USD 1347.5 in 2005 to USD 1211.9 in 2020, dropping to USD 878.1 in 2008.[43]

Gaza has been subjected to five wars during the 2008–2022 period, in addition to over 30 separate Israeli military operations and assaults. This protracted context of intermittent high impact urban warfare has produced vast rebuilding needs in Gaza. Between 2007 and 2022, a total of 5,418 people were killed, and more than 60,000 buildings were completely or partially damaged, including factories, commercial and public facilities, and residential units.[44] The multiple wars compounded the pre-existing situation through the destruction of capital, infrastructure, private businesses, and productive capacities capable of securing opportunities for employment generation and economic growth. These accumulated conflict-related impacts were further compounded by the war that erupted in October 2023, bringing about a devastating toll on the Gaza Strip. Whilst the 2023/2024 war is not the focus of this paper, the insights into the rebuilding process after the 2021 and 2022 wars can serve to inform the tailoring of contextually-rooted reconstruction strategies following the 2023 Israeli invasion and widespread destruction in Gaza.

2021 and 2022 wars: impact of conflict and rebuilding

This section overviews the extent of the destruction brought about by the 2021 and 2022 wars on Gaza and the key trends in rebuilding since May 2021 in terms of direct impact, cost of damages, outcomes, and trends in rebuilding.

Direct impact of 2021 and 2022 wars

The 11-day war in 2021 resulted in the deaths of 261 in Gaza and 14 in Israel.[45] Figure 1 demonstrates that the 2022 war was less costly in human life with 49 Palestinians killed and 383 injured.[46] The 2021 war was also more destructive than the three-day 2022 war in the housing, economy, and agricultural sectors, primarily because it was longer in duration. For example, and as indicated in Figure 2, Israel completely destroyed 1,689 housing units in 2021 compared to 26 in 2022.[47] The same figure shows a huge difference in the partial damage between 2021 and 2022 reaching the figures of 60,599 and 1,445 housing units respectively.[48] The large number of house destructions in 2021 led to the displacement of 117,000 individuals to various places, of which 77,000 sought refuge in

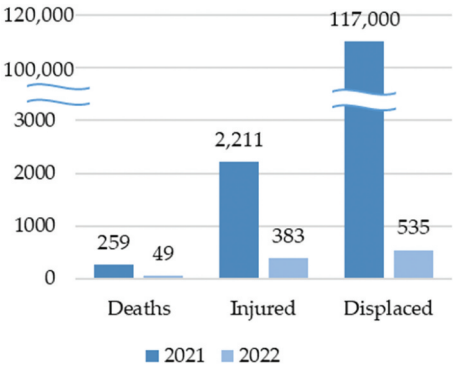


Figure 1. Direct human cost of conflict in Gaza. *Sources:* MOH, Infographic of the Israeli; UNRWA, Donor Charts: 2021 Pledges.

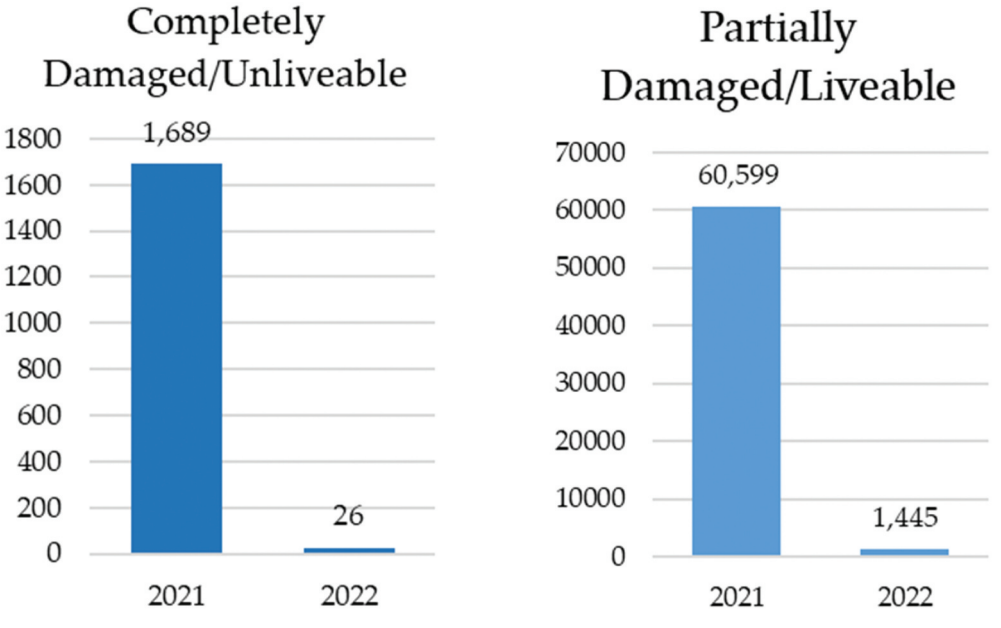


Figure 2. Direct damages to housing. *Source:* Shelter Cluster, Shelter Statistics.

UN Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) schools whilst 7,250 remained internally displaced before the August 2022 war.[49]

Cost of damages

A rapid needs assessment conducted by the World Bank, the European Union (EU), and the United Nations (UN) following the 2021 war estimated damages to be in the range of USD 290–380 million, of which USD 140–180 million were damages to the social sector that was the most severely affected.[50] That assessment found that 'the housing sector alone represents almost 93 per cent of the total damage in the social sectors'.[51] Following

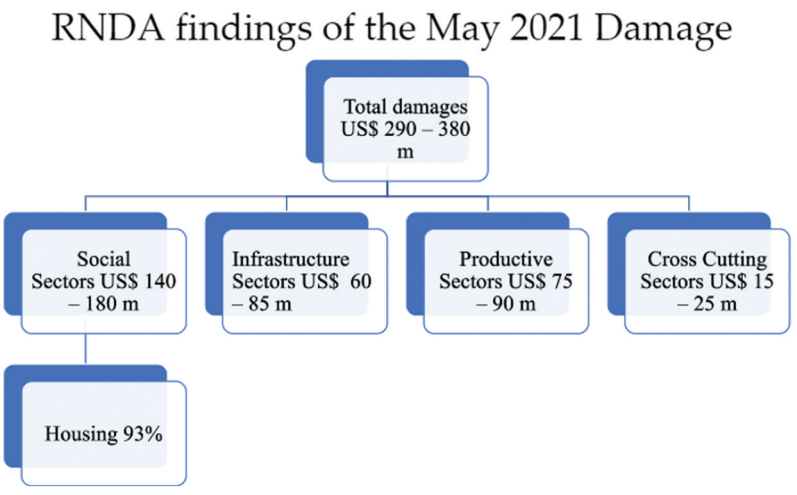


Figure 3. Cost of damages from 2021 war. *Source:* World Bank Group, Gaza Rapid Damage.

the social sector, productive sector damages were estimated to be between USD 75–80 million, and the infrastructure sector damages are estimated to be between USD 60–85 million, as indicated in Figure 3.[52] In addition, the estimated recovery and reconstruction needs during the first two years are up to USD 485 million.[53]

Official estimates from the Ministry of Public Works and Housing (MPWH) put the costs of destruction from the 2022 war at USD 4 million, in addition to unmet rebuilding needs from previous wars.[54] The shelter cluster estimates the cost of damage at USD 3 million, of which USD 2 million are for repair and USD 1 million for reconstruction.[55] The emergency appeal by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) stated that the 2022 war 'created additional needs and exacerbated existing ones' with a funding goal of USD 15,463,000, of which only USD 3,260,000 was met by the end of August 2022.[56]

Post-2021 and post-2022 reconstruction: trends and patterns

This section presents an analysis of the trends and patterns in reconstruction of the Gaza Strip in the post-2021 and post-2022 war periods. A central finding suggests that the reconstruction process was slow and low scale in comparison to previous rounds of rebuilding after the 2008/09, 2012, and 2014 wars.

Firstly, the reconstruction projects funded by Egypt made limited progress. In the immediate aftermath of the 2021 war, donors pledged significant funding for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. Most notably, the Egyptian National Committee for the Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip announced its reconstruction plan after pledging USD 500 million.[57] The first phase of its projects was to remove all debris and rubble of destroyed buildings, which was completed within 65 days.[58] The second phase was called 'the development of Gaza Corniche, residential communities' and includes six projects: the development of the Gaza Corniche, building three residential communities, namely Dar Misr 1, Dar Misr 2, and Dar Misr 3, and establishing two bridges.[59]

After completing the first phase, President Sisi announced at the World Youth Forum in Sharm Al-Sheikh that longer term reconstruction projects in Gaza require greater funding than the USD 500 million pledged by Egypt.[60] Naji Sarhan, the undersecretary of the MPWH in Gaza, noted at a press conference that Egypt started with the reconstruction of the 1.8 km Corniche located in the north of Gaza City,[61] yet by 12 September 2022 only 18 per cent of the workload was completed.[62] In addition, there are Egyptian efforts in the reconstruction of three residential communities that include 117 buildings.[63] Whilst there are indicators of progress on many of these Egyptian projects, the total expenditure as a proportion of the USD 500 million reconstruction pledge is unknown.[64] Furthermore, in 2022, Qatar began working on building 239 residential units with a total budget of USD 10.6 million,[65] in addition to repairing eleven partially damaged residential buildings. UNRWA's reconstruction projects, which were funded by Qatar, were not launched until March 2022.[66] By June 2022, UNRWA began the disbursement of initial payments towards 260 totally destructed housing units out of the total 700 units under its funding, and it disbursed USD 14 million for 6,200 partially damaged units.[67]

Secondly, shelter reconstruction in the post-2021 period has been highly limited. One year after the conflict, only 1 per cent of the totally damaged housing units were reconstructed and 9 per cent remained in progress.[68] Out of the 1,689 destroyed houses, only 20 units were reconstructed, 159 were under process, 236 were funded, 708 were pledged, and there remained a gap of 565.[69] By September 2022, approximately 3.7 per cent of the units were reconstructed, and 924 of the unreconstructed units were parts of the 10 towers that were destroyed and received no pledges of funds for rebuilding.[70] The completion rate was higher for partially damaged units – 48166 of the severe and partially damaged houses were repaired, 100 were under progress, and the gap stood at 12,333 units.[71] In 2022, 7,250 individuals remained internally displaced.[72] By September 2022, there was a deficit of USD 14 million for the repair of approximately 10,000 partially damaged units from the 2021 war caseload.[73]

Thirdly, in the first year after the May 2021 war, progress in the reconstruction of the industrial, commercial, and infrastructure sectors was negligible.[74] In a minor positive example, several streets were rehabilitated and tiled with interlock.[75] However, there was no substantive achievement in the economic and agricultural sectors. The local committee within the *de facto* authorities in Gaza that was mandated to supervise reconstruction 'was unable' to provide any assistance to the owners of the affected factories and farms 'due to the lack of financial support from donors'.[76]

Gaza is accustomed to heavier and longer wars that are more destructive. Therefore, the three-day war in August 2022 received little attention from donors, researchers, and organisations working in Gaza.[77] Out of the 26 totally damaged houses in 2022, none were reconstructed or in progress by October 2022.[78] By the same time, only one out of the 1,445 partially damaged housing units was rebuilt and 410 remained under progress.[79] This is added to the 1,029 partially damaged units from 2014, 221 units from 2018 and 2019, and 924 units from May 2021 without any source of funding.[80]

Prioritisation of new construction over reconstruction

Egypt's emergence as a major donor has been another significant change in re-shaping the context of reconstruction in Gaza after the 2021 war. Following the 2008/09 war on

Gaza, Egypt did not fund or play any role in reconstruction, except for hosting donor conferences that were important in mobilising funds for reconstruction. However, in the aftermath of the 2021 war, Egypt's policies distinctly changed with its pledge of USD 500 million in aid and its direct role in implementing projects in Gaza. Egypt emerged as the key player, replacing Qatar as the single largest bilateral donor in the Gaza Strip. It also positioned itself as the mediator, at the insistence of the United States (U.S.) and Israel, to broker the deal to resume the transfer of USD 30 million per month in Qatari aid, which includes funding the fuel that Egypt transfers to Gaza.[81] This is said to bolster the Egypt's role in the region.[82]

Egypt's emerging role in Gaza must be understood in connection with its diplomatic role and strategic interests. Since at least 2018, Egypt has played a key role in mediation between Hamas and Israel. Despite bad relations between Hamas and Egypt, which stem largely from Hamas's support of the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt maintained its role in intervening and hosting the relevant parties to achieve peace. In doing so, and in addition to its achievement in reaching a ceasefire between the parties, Egypt enhances its role as an important regional power and improves its relations with the new administration in the U.S.[83] Despite Egypt's historic role in Gaza, its influence declined due to the economic and political crises it faced after the 2011 revolution.[84] Egypt feared that strengthening relations between Hamas and Qatar, Turkey, and Iran would affect its role as a major mediator. Consequently, Egypt opted to increase its influence on Hamas, which led it to directly pledge and intervene in rebuilding Gaza.[85]

Egypt's role as the major player in the Gaza Strip, however, has several shortcomings. Most directly, Egypt's role is not in reconstruction of damaged and destroyed infrastructure but rather in new construction projects. Egypt is not playing a role in rebuilding what was damaged during the war,[86] but what is seen on the ground is the undertaking of humanitarian projects to aid the people of Gaza. For example, the building of three residential communities is not considered a rebuilding project because it does not rebuild destroyed houses. Furthermore, the criteria for registering for such housing do not prioritise beneficiaries with houses damaged during the war, but rather homeless individuals and renters able to provide a down payment and monthly instalments.[87] The names are then chosen by lottery for those who meet the conditions.[88] In addition, the development of the Gaza Corniche and construction of two bridges are classified as rebuilding war-related damage but are developmental projects.[89]

Another key trend is that Egypt's projects are neither building local capacities in Gaza nor stimulating the local economy to any significant degree. The Egyptian model involves awarding contracts to Egyptian companies and employing Egyptian workers. Previous rounds of reconstruction created thousands of jobs for Gazan architects, engineers, and construction workers which, whilst unable to create mass employment, did provide career opportunities for these individuals and support for the livelihoods of their families. The import of Egyptian workers and companies was a missed opportunity for early recovery because it did not allow the recruitment of Palestinian workers despite an unemployment rate of over 50 per cent. Under the Egyptian plan, Palestinian workers were to be engaged in the project during the second phase of construction efforts. Furthermore, profits from construction in Gaza form part of the Egyptian strategy for rewarding key clients in stabilising the Sinai Peninsula. Most Egyptian projects were directly implemented by the 'Abnaa Sinai' contracting company, owned by a Bedouin

tribal leader and businessman who cooperates with the Egyptian military in fighting terrorist groups in the Sinai, which highlights the political paradigm of Egyptian aid and development in Gaza.[90]

In sum, reconstruction progress across all sectors analysed was extremely slow following the 2021 and 2022 wars. The next section analyses the various factors that explain why this pattern is observed.

Explaining outcomes in post-2021 reconstruction

This section will analyse several key factors that explain the outcomes observed in the post-2021 reconstruction process. Shrinking reconstruction space in Gaza during 2021 and 2022 must be understood in relation to a changing political and security context, which will first be analysed. This sets the scene for a more in-depth analysis of several factors that have been frequently analysed as explanatory in studies of Gaza's previous rounds of reconstruction will be addressed: restrictions on the flow of rebuilding materials, reconstruction financing levels, and the governance and ownership of the reconstruction process. This combination of a changing political and security dynamics and attendant shifts in the key elements of funds, resources, and power together constitute the context of reconstruction in the post-2021 and post-2022 war periods.

Shifting conflict dynamics

The 2021 war in Gaza occurred in a context of months of simmering tensions in the West Bank and Jerusalem, in particular due to the forced evictions from the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood and clashes over access to Al Aqsa Mosque. Hamas issued a red line involving incursions to Al Aqsa, which was crossed, and rocket fire by Hamas into Israel was met with an Israeli response, triggering an escalatory cycle. The most analytically relevant development in this episode was that conflict dynamics in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had evolved to the point where events in the West Bank and Jerusalem were emergent triggers of violence in the Gaza Strip. Hamas perceived this as a success in strategically linking Palestinian issues across the West Bank and Gaza, in their words a linking of the two battlefields, to a level not witnessed in decades.

Essentially, conflict dynamics have evolved with far more potential triggers of violence. This is evident in the fact that war and conflict have become more frequent in recent years, with approximately one year separating each of the 2021, 2022, and 2023 wars. One Palestinian expert noted how donors reach a level of fatigue when they see the results of their rebuilding efforts destroyed in a short period of weeks or months.[91] The growing risk of a more frequent conflict cycle is likely understood to contribute towards the intensifying donor fatigue. It has also prompted significant changes in Israeli government policy towards Gaza's reconstruction.

Israeli policy under coalition government

The political context of reconstruction in the post-2021 war period was marked by a new coalition government in Israel from June 2021, led initially by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett. During each round of reconstruction following the

2008/09, 2012, and 2014 wars, Benjamin Netanyahu served as Prime Minister. Naftali Bennett followed a different path than that followed by his predecessor, who publicly adopted a hard-line stance against Palestinians.[92] Bennett, along with then-Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, worked on regaining the support of the Western countries by shifting official discourse towards talk of 'shrinking the conflict' by simultaneously developing the Palestinian economy and weakening Hamas.[93]

Israel's policy towards the reconstruction of Gaza was one of the most significant contextual changes in the year following the May 2021 war. In terms of policy pronouncements, the new Israeli government laid out a new plan for Gaza that promised large-scale reconstruction albeit with heavy conditionalities in terms of security. In September 2021, Yair Lapid proposed the 'economy for security' formula for Gaza, the rationale for which proposed that military escalations could be ameliorated or ended altogether by increasing investments in Gaza, including infrastructure development and boosting employment levels.[94]

The 'Lapid Plan' was proposed to include two phases. The first phase involved a limited opening of border crossings and addressing humanitarian needs. During 2021 and 2022, some progress towards the implementation of this part of the plan was made. Israeli authorities loosened some restrictions, allowing the entry of specific construction materials in particular iron and cement, expanded the fishing zone to 22 nautical miles, and increased the capacity of the Karam Abu Salem border crossing with Israel.

Furthermore, Israel gradually started increasing the work permits in the aftermath of the 2021 war to a total of 17,000 by September 2022.[95] Due to the uprising in the West Bank in early May 2021, Israel denied all Palestinian workers in the Gaza Strip access across the border.[96] Furthermore, and due to the 2022 conflict 14,000 work permit holders could not go to work, resulting in lost earnings of USD 4.5 million.[97] Re-opening the border to Palestinian workers in Israel was a key factor in livelihood support for many families in Gaza, yet it remained tied to the preservation of security and stability. It is also a key mechanism through which individuals whose homes were damaged or destroyed in military operations can self-finance repair and rebuild.

The second phase of the Lapid Plan would eventually involve large-scale infrastructural projects including the construction of a seaport off the coast of Gaza, a highway connecting Gaza to the West Bank, industrial zones near Beit Hanoun border crossing, and the encouragement of international investments in Gaza's economy.[98]

However, as has been seen, reconstruction after 2021 was minimal. Large-scale reconstruction in the Gaza Strip was prevented under the new Israeli policy as the promise of rebuilding essentially became a bargaining chip in negotiations with Hamas. Israeli officials openly stated that the Israeli strategy was to limit reconstruction following the 2021 war, with the sanctioning of a resumption of large-scale rebuilding dependent upon Hamas releasing two detained Israeli civilians and the remains of two Israeli soldiers killed in 2014. This was reinforced in the aftermath of the 2022 military escalation by Lapid, where Israel reverted to 'civil policy towards the Gaza Strip with limitations on the issue of reconstruction, until there is progress with the missing and captured', according to COGAT chief Major General Ghassan Alian.[99] As a result, various restrictions were re-imposed during and after the August 2022 escalation. As

long as these permissions are conditional and not permanent, reconstruction cannot be guaranteed because donor confidence to invest in long-term and large-scale infrastructure will not be generated. What this made clear is that the dynamics and realities of reconstruction in the Gaza Strip were made hostage to, and dictated by, the policies of the Israeli government.

Israel's conditioning of reconstruction in the Gaza Strip upon security and 'calm' has been implemented through calibrating the volume of financial resources that it permits entry to Gaza and the availability of construction materials – which have been demonstrated to be the two most causally relevant factors in explaining reconstruction outcomes in Gaza. As is observed in this paper, in the post-2021 period materials were more readily available whilst funding levels dried up – a reversal of the previous pattern in the post-2008/2009, 2012, and post-2014 war periods. The interplay between these two factors can best be interpreted as a strategy for intentionally shrinking reconstruction space in the Gaza Strip.

The large reduction in donor funding for reconstruction is in large part explainable in relation to the veto power exercised by Israel over aid entering Gaza. Naji Sarhan states that 'when funding was available in 2014, Israel prevented materials from entering. When materials were available in 2021, Israel prevented funding from entering'. This is not a new Israeli policy, as 'this policy is followed by the Israeli governments since 2008'.[100] Avigdor Lieberman, former Deputy Prime Minister of Israel, noted that what Israel wants with the Palestinians in Gaza is 'to keep their heads above water' by not drowning.[101] Understanding this Israeli policy, Sarhan explains that UN agencies can mitigate this political pressure but not in full – estimating that they can channel a maximum of 30 per cent of the desired funding levels into the Gaza Strip against the wishes of Israel.[102]

These realities of aid around Gaza are crucial to the understanding of the shrinking reconstruction space in the Strip. The international donors have been unable, and arguably unwilling, to challenge these realities, which only serves to maintain and further exacerbate the dysfunctional status quo in the territory.

Cross-border flows of materials

The post-2021 phase of Gaza's reconstruction took place in a context in which the regulation of cross-border flows of materials was significantly altered in comparison to the post-2014 period. Analysis of rebuilding in Gaza has focused on the varying intensity with which the blockade has been implemented since 2007 and the implications for cross-border flows of materials, resources, and people.[103] These flows were regulated through the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM). Whilst the GRM formalised and legitimised reconstruction, it was critiqued as an institutionalisation of the blockade that transferred the responsibility for maintaining the isolation of Gaza from Israel to the UN.[104]

In the post-2021 phase of reconstruction, the GRM remained formally in place. Israel continued to control what enters and what exits Gaza, including construction materials, people, goods, and funds disbursed for reconstruction.[105] After the 2021 assault, during the period from late May to the end of August 2021, Israel closed the Beit Hanoun and Karam Abu Salem border crossings and prevented the entry of all types of goods,

including construction materials, and movement of people in and out of Gaza.[106] This period of around three months was the most severe in terms of restrictions on the flow of construction materials, as well as on the export and import of items in Gaza – and was comparable to the period immediately after the 2008/09 war, which was one of the slowest periods of rebuilding in Gaza's recent history.

The GRM in 2021 also expanded its remit from reconstruction materials to restrict various other social and economic sectors, including the import of hospital equipment.[107] In addition, vehicles, trucks, and cranes were not allowed to enter Gaza, which created a struggle for the municipalities and the civil defence during the war to remove the debris and rubble.[108] Israel also continued to block the import[109] of 'dual-use items' based on short-term Israeli security calculations.[110] Various organisations and countries pressed for an end to the GRM, which placed pressure on Israel to mask or reduce the presence of the mechanism.[111] The dual-use items list was previously published on the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) website, but it was removed in 2022, which decreased transparency regarding decisions on the amount permitted for the items on the list.[112]

Yet despite the persistence of the GRM, several developments significantly altered the influence of the agreement over the constitution of reconstruction space in the Gaza Strip. Table 1 shows the changes in the border restrictions in Gaza from May 2021 until August 2022. By the end of August 2021, Israel started to ease its restrictions on the movement of people and goods, 'restoring the situation at the crossings to more or less the situation prior to the May hostilities'.[113] It allowed the entrance of construction materials, including metal, cement, gravel, ceramic tiles, and steel bars upon the approval of the Israeli authorities that still prevented 'dual-use' items from entering Gaza.[114]

Table 1. Changes in border control restrictions.

Date	Border easing
11–23 May 2021	Erez (Beit Hanoun) and Kerem Shalom (Kerem Abu Salem) crossings closed completely
25 May 2021	Partial opening of crossings and allowing humanitarian basic needs (medicines, limited amounts of food, and medical equipment), but severe restrictions on movement of people and goods
30 May 2021	Allowed entrance of limited amount of fuel
3 June 2021	Patients allowed to exit Gaza via Erez (Beit Hanoun) for life-saving treatment
22 June 2021	Gaza produce was shipped for sale in the West Bank but with the conditional exit of tomatoes that the stems were removed
27–28 June 2021	Materials for the food processing industry permitted; industrial diesel for the power plant to enter via Kerem Shalom (Kerem Abu Salem); fertilisers and agricultural equipment entered the Strip
29 June 2021	Outgoing mail was permitted; Israel announced that it would restore the marketing of fish from Gaza in the West Bank
12 July 2021	Allowance of entry of fishing and raw materials for industry
13 August 2021	Allowance of communication equipment; allowance of exports from Gaza at pre-war levels; acceptance of the entrance of 3,000 merchants
19 August 2021	Restoring entry of some construction materials for international projects
1 September 2021	Permitted entry of construction materials for Gaza's private sector; allowed 5,000 more workers in addition to the previous 3,000 permits
20 October 2021	Increased the number of workers' permits for Israel to 10,000
26 June 2022	Increased the number of workers' permits to 14,000
19 August 2022	Increasing the number of workers' permits by 1,500, increasing the total permits to 15,500
22 September 2022	Increasing the number of permits by 1,500, to reach 17,000

Source: Gisha, Gaza Policy Forum; Gisha, Crossings Update: Fuel; Gisha, Three-month Block; Gisha, Crossings Update: Scant; Gisha, Israel's Restrictions at Gaza.

Telecommunications equipment was also allowed to enter, which enabled the repair of up to 70 per cent of network reconstruction required after the May 2021 war.[115]

After the 2014 war, the availability of Aggregate, Steel Bars, and Cement (ABC) – all heavily regulated by the GRM – was a critical factor in explaining the slow and ineffective outcomes of the reconstruction process. By contrast, following the removal of construction materials from the GRM list, there were ample supplies available on the local market in the Gaza Strip. It was stated that 'today we can find iron and cement in the market, which were the two most difficult materials to get, and which had more restrictions'.[116] In addition to allowing these materials through Beit Hanoun, their import was also permitted through Egypt.[117]

In summary, this section explained that whilst the border restrictions affect the slow pace of rebuilding during the initial three months of heavy restrictions, the return to previous levels of border restriction from August/September 2021 was not followed by a dramatic acceleration of the rebuilding process. It should therefore be concluded that other variables were more significant in influencing the speed and scale of reconstruction during this period.

Lack of local ownership and participation

This section examines the challenges and impacts of the lack of local ownership and participation in the post-2021 Gaza reconstruction process. Following the 2014 war, the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) – an agreement reached in 2014 under which the UN regulates cross-border flows in and out of the Gaza Strip – adopted an approach to reconstruction that was heavily top-down and did not include the local authorities or community in the planning process. This mechanism relied heavily on external actors, notably Israel, the PA, and the UN, sidelining Hamas, Gaza's de facto authority. This was in line with the long-standing 'No Contact Policy', implemented by the U.S. and followed by other donors, which excludes Hamas from the governance of reconstruction in Gaza.[118] Such a top-down approach in these complex governance arrangements has been identified as a primary causal factor in explaining the pitfalls of previous rounds of rebuilding in the Gaza Strip.[119]

The post-2021 rebuilding phase is characterised by continuity with this dynamic, as local civil society and the de facto local authorities continued to be excluded from the planning and implementation processes. In the post-2021 rebuilding, the Biden administration had an opportunity to shift U.S. policy towards Palestine, following a Trump administration heavily favoured Israel over the Palestinians by cutting aid and through recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel then moving the U.S. embassy there.[120] Whilst the Biden administration, did take steps to improve U.S.-Palestinian relations through the resumption of aid and recommitting to the two-state solution,[121] it continued to exclude Hamas, which the U.S. proscribes as a terrorist group, from any role in foreign aid, with U.S. aid provided through the PA instead.[122]

This perpetuated a situation under which the de facto government in the Gaza Strip was not in the lead role in governing the reconstruction process. Excluding Hamas from the planning and implementation processes served as an obstacle to donor coordination and also blocked opportunities for reconciliation between

Hamas and Fatah. However, despite being excluded, Hamas allowed access to various organisations, potentially to avoid losing popular legitimacy.[123] Nevertheless, this dynamic of exclusion represented a missed opportunity to improve situation in Gaza, which is well-reflected in the words of the Palestinian economist Omar Shaban, who argues that 'we need a real political process... which will raise the question of the recognition of the entity that administers Gaza (Hamas)'.[124]

In terms of civil society, in 2021 the local community in Gaza was not consulted or included at any stage of the reconstruction process. Egypt, as the new major bilateral players, continued this trend of externally-led reconstruction in Gaza. Consequently, Egypt's reconstruction projects and plans were driven by a set of priorities that differed from the priorities of the local community in Gaza.[125] For example, Sarhan emphasised that the priority of the local government and community is for the reconstruction of homes, residential towers, and industrial and commercial facilities,[126] whilst Egypt prioritised the development of Gaza Corniche in addition to the construction of two bridges.[127] Local community participation and engagement could have helped to close this gap between reconstruction needs and demands with the supply-driven rebuilding model. However, by contrast, several projects were funded by UNRWA and Qatar that provided compensation for owners of completely and partially damaged units to rebuild their houses. For instance, by June 2022, Qatar and UNRWA had compensated home-owners for 239 and 368 housing units respectively, allowing homeowners to rebuild based on their needs and preferences.[128]

Reconstruction financing

The most prominent feature of the rebuilding process in the post-2021 and post-2022 periods, compared to the post-2014 phase, is the lack or absence of donors.[129] Whilst the 2021 war was followed by some pledges of assistance for reconstruction, almost no pledges for rebuilding were made in the one month after the 2022 war.[130] The total amount pledged by all the players equals about 25 per cent of the total amount pledged in the post-2014 war period.[131] In particular, Western donors were notably absent from funding pledges for rebuilding in 2021 and 2022. Rather, Western bilateral donors offered some limited emergency funding for Gaza (Figure 4). The UN's emergency response fund was replenished with a mere USD 22.5 million.[132]

Additionally, the United Nations launched an emergency plan, the inter-agency Flash Appeal, requesting USD 95 million over three months to fund emergency humanitarian and early recovery responses, of which nearly USD 66.5 million was raised.[133]

All in all, Palestine has received upwards of USD 40 billion in aid since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993.[134] Despite being one of the world's largest recipients of non-military aid, this aid has failed to achieve genuine developmental progress.[135] Rather, funding to Palestine is governed by the political and security dynamics surrounding the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The issue here is not to do with the availability of funds, but rather to do with these dynamics. A crucial dimension to understand the dynamics of reconstruction financing within the context of Palestine is the examination of the approaches of the donors themselves.

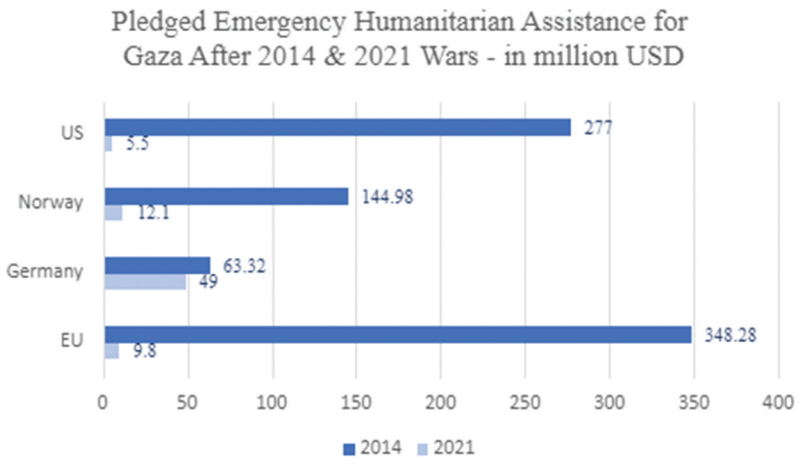


Figure 4. Pledged emergency humanitarian assistance for Gaza after 2014 and May 2021 (USD million). *Source:* World Bank Group, Gaza Rapid Damage; Al-Monitor Staff, A Look at Which Countries; Aila and Day, With Thousands Left Homeless.

Arab donors

Over the past few decades, Arab donors, in particular Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, have established themselves as amongst the major donors to Palestine – albeit adopting various modalities for directing aid to recipients.[136] These Gulf state donors were significant bilateral providers of reconstruction funding following previous wars on Gaza. Yet in the post-2021 war phase, the once-prominent role of these Gulf states in Gaza's reconstruction was notably diminished.

Firstly, in the last ten years, Qatar has provided more than USD 3 billion in aid for Palestine that was agreed to by Israel.[137] Despite this large headline figure, Qatar's declining role in rebuilding Gaza over the period 2018 to 2022 is a major aspect of the shrinking reconstruction space. In March 2018, an anonymous source from the Qatar Committee for the Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip stated to the media that money for large-scale rebuilding projects was running out with no indication of a renewal of the grants and that subsequently 'Qatar will focus on relief and humanitarian aid and not development projects and infrastructure, projects currently stalled due to the difficult economic situation in the Strip'.[138]

Qatar's shift to primarily humanitarian support in 2018 came in the context of the 'Qatari grant agreement' – signed by Hamas, Qatar, Egypt, the UN, and Israel – which included civil servant salary payments, cash assistance to poor families, and fuel payments with the aim of preventing conflict escalation.[139] Qatar renewed this emergency and development support in 2021, where it pledged USD 40 million over four months as cash assistance to be provided by the UN, in addition to the USD 10 million per month for fuel to the Gaza Power Plant.[140] Doha and Cairo also signed an agreement in November 2021 on supplying fuel and building materials for Gaza.[141]

In the post-2021 period, Qatar pledged USD 500 million for rebuilding, which was the second largest bilateral commitment.[142] However, officials in Gaza report that 'Qatar has so far given only USD 10 million of the USD 500 million pledged.

This has been used to fix damaged roads and around 100 housing units and 12 residential buildings'.[143] Qatari expenditure in Gaza after the 2021 war was under the monthly grant and not from the reconstruction funding that it had pledged.[144] It is very likely that Qatar would have provided much greater support for the large-scale reconstruction of the Gaza Strip but was prevented from doing so by Israel. One official in Gaza stated that 'in the end, the State of Qatar can only bring in the money with Israeli approval. I think that Qatar wants to offer more than it does'.[145]

Secondly, Saudi Arabia (KSA), Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have been major donors to Palestine, and Gaza in particular, at various points in recent history.[146] However, Saudi and Emirati relations with Hamas weakened considerably in the post-Arab Spring context characterised by their rejection of political Islam in the MENA region, whilst more recently their ties with Israel have strengthened through normalisation and under the veil of the Abraham Accords.[147] Gulf aid is heavily politicised, with funding disbursed to rival administrations in Palestine. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have focused their provision of aid and assistance to the West Bank whilst Qatar has focused its aid and assistance to Gaza Strip. These changing patterns in the region's geopolitics are the primary factor behind the decrease in Saudi and Emirati funding to Palestine, and Gaza in particular. In 2014, KSA and the UAE pledged USD 500 million and USD 200 million respectively, of which KSA disbursed USD 116.12 million and the UAE disbursed USD 63.92 million.[148] However, in the aftermath of the 2021 war, KSA and the UAE did not pledge any assistance to UNRWA[149] and did not provide any reconstruction assistance.[150] Financial support to Gaza has become heavily securitised in KSA and the UAE, whilst Palestinians in those states were even arrested for collecting and transferring funds to Hamas in the Gaza Strip.[151]

Finally, Egypt, which did not provide any reconstruction funding following the 2014 war on Gaza,[152] pledged USD 500 million for various projects.[153] Also, Egypt did not host an international funding conference for the reconstruction of Gaza, which it did in the aftermath of the previous three wars.[154] Yet, as has been seen earlier, Egypt played a minimal role in reconstruction with its projects largely falling under the category of newly built development and construction activities.

Explaining reductions in reconstruction financing

The observable major drop in donor funds for reconstruction in 2021 and 2022 is one of the most important factors explaining the slow reconstruction. There are multiple factors that produced this restrictive funding environment, including recurrent warfare, intra-Palestinian divisions, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine.

Firstly, after each war in Gaza there were fears that 'donor fatigue' would limit the mobilisation of financial resources for reconstruction. The cyclical nature of destruction and rebuilding in Gaza since 2008 entails understandable hesitation amongst donors in funding long-term rebuilding, given the risk that their projects could be damaged or destroyed in the near future.[155] In 2014, an international conference was held in Cairo, at which USD 5 billion were pledged from a diverse range of funders.[156] Yet, after the 2014 war, 'a sense of futility took hold over some of the Western donors, as they saw their previous investments go up in the flames of war for the second, and in some cases, third time, making them apprehensive about providing further funding'.[157] This was clear in

the speech of then-U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, stating that 'this is the third time in less than six years that, together with the people of Gaza, we have been forced to confront a reconstruction effort'.[158] Yet, and despite the repeated predictions of imminent donor fatigue, in each round of reconstruction in 2008/09, 2012, and 2014, significant levels of external resources were mobilised.

The persistence of intra-Palestinian divisions is another factor in deterring large-scale financing of reconstruction, in particular for Western donors. In previous rounds of reconstruction, multiple donors made a high proportion of their pledges conditional upon the achievement of Palestinian reconciliation and an end to the Hamas-Fatah rift. The central theme of these conditionalities was the touted peace process that was built on the idea of a two-state solution. However, in the seven years from the 2014 war to the 2021 war, intra-Palestinian divisions became further entrenched with no tangible progress towards reconciliation. From the Western viewpoint, the prospects of a 'peaceful solution' were dealt a fatal blow and focus shifted elsewhere. This has made Western donors wary of any new plans for reconstruction financing in Gaza. However, rather than seek to pressure Israel or alter its behaviour in and approach to Gaza, it began withdrawing from the scene altogether. This, along with the conditionality of intra-Palestinian reconciliation, effectively unburdened Israel from its responsibilities as an occupying force.

This was detrimental to the prospects of peace, where support to Palestine was conditional on factors not entirely in their control whilst also leaving support to Israel unhindered by any mechanisms of accountability for its actions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The absence of such accountability, which could take the form of support tied to peace dividends, only serves to exacerbate the confounded reality of aid in Palestine.

The fall in donor support following the 2021 war is, in part, explainable as a product of donor fatigue finally taking course due to these growing concerns. However, the reduced level of funding in 2021 is not explainable solely in terms of factors internal to the cycle of destruction in Gaza.

Donor fatigue is also relevant in the wider context of reconstruction funding in the MENA region. After the 2014 war in Gaza, the MENA region experienced many destructive conflicts, in particular the bombing of Syrian cities following Russia's intervention in 2015, the war in Yemen, and the campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. This interpretation of the funding context is reflected by one expert in Gaza who stated that 'there are many donors we have lost after the crises in Syria and Yemen, as there is a shift in funding to support Syrian refugees in camps in Jordan and elsewhere'.[159] There is an evident shift in the priorities of Western donors, whose aid has historically been driven by specific strategic interests that have undergone significant changes in recent years. In the past, Western aid was focused on the Palestinian Authority as a means of maintaining the fragile veil of stability.[160]

The post-2021 context of rebuilding differed from other post-war phases in Gaza due to marked seismic shifts at the global level, primarily with the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These factors affected the funding, logistics, and politics of the reconstruction process. In early 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic triggered an unparalleled economic catastrophe.[161] This had major effects on global humanitarian funding, with public donor

spending falling by USD 284 million from 2019 to 2020 whilst more than USD 4.5 billion was cut from funding for non-COVID-related needs.[162] The increase of global humanitarian needs by 27 per cent in 2020 and a lack of funding led to a shortfall in humanitarian assistance of USD 18.8 billion worldwide.[163] Palestine, like many other countries, receives the majority of its donations and funds from public donors, in particular the U.S., EU, and the Gulf countries.[164] The May 2021 war on the Gaza Strip came at a time when much of the world was reeling from the lockdown's ramifications on public finances.

Gaza's rebuilding has also been indirectly impacted by the effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The conflict triggered the largest geopolitical crisis since the end of the Cold War and affected Gaza's reconstruction in several ways. In terms of funding, the potential for large-scale reconstruction assistance in Gaza was reduced as international aid was redirected towards supporting Ukraine militarily and responding to the resulting humanitarian crisis. The Ukraine crisis triggered a shift in emergency funding as 'the immediate priority for the global policy community is to support humanitarian relief efforts in war-torn Ukraine'.[165] Western countries also provided large levels of military assistance to Ukraine. By August 2022, the total global commitments for Ukraine had reached 84.2 billion Euros.[166]

Another effect has been the disruption of global supply chains and rising commodity prices, in particular energy and construction materials. The invasion of Ukraine has, more than any war in recent history, spurred inflation globally, which is reflected in the soaring prices of various products, such as food, metal, and fuel.[167] This is because 'Russia is a major supplier of oil, gas, and metals, and, together with Ukraine, of wheat and corn'.[168]

As a response to rising prices, various countries imposed export restrictions, including Egypt which is a major market for materials procurement for Gazan construction firms. By the beginning of April 2022, exports of cement to Gaza fell from 3,000 tons per week to less than 1,000 tons per week.[169] Higher commodity prices also increase operational costs for organisations and hinder the rebuilding process. Gaza imports most of its iron from Ukraine and Russia, which has led to rising prices of reconstruction materials in Gaza since early 2022.[170] Naji Sarhan stated that 'we face a problem in awarding tenders at the lowest prices, which in turn leads to contractors halting during implementation'.[171] This is the result of 'the rising prices of most raw materials in Gaza, most of which rose by more than 30 per cent in addition to fuel prices'.[172] Iron prices rose by more than 36 per cent, asphalt by more than 60 per cent, copper by 35 per cent, and aluminium prices almost doubled.[173] As a result, out of the 250 contractor companies working in Gaza, at least 100 were at risk of bankruptcy by mid-2022.[174] Contractors in Gaza had warned that if the situation were not managed properly then a 'real catastrophe' would ensue.[175]

These two crises directly impacted the landscape of humanitarian aid around the globe and led to restrained reconstruction funding, with the exceptions of Egypt and Qatar.[176] These exogenous factors compounded internal funding obstacles in the Gaza Strip and cumulatively hindered an already slow reconstruction process.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the challenges and outcomes of post-conflict reconstruction in the Gaza Strip following the 2021 and 2022 wars. It began by establishing a research framework and situating the Gaza Strip within broader discussions on post-conflict reconstruction in the Middle East and North Africa. An overview of Gaza's situation and the impacts of the recent wars set the stage for a detailed evaluation of reconstruction progress in the year after the 2021 conflict. This analysis assessed various factors that have historically influenced reconstruction, as well as new developments affecting the recent efforts.

Our findings reveal that a combination of factors, including import restrictions, limited local ownership, and intra-Palestinian divisions, have hindered reconstruction. However, the most significant barrier identified in the post-2021 context is the acute lack of funding resources. This marks a notable change from earlier periods following the 2008/09, 2012, and 2014 wars, where physical and logistical constraints were the primary challenges. The study highlights the need for international reconstruction efforts in Gaza to prioritise the provision of supplies and financial support, possibly requiring political initiatives to ensure effective delivery. Additionally, addressing the broader issues fuelling Gaza's repeated cycles of destruction, notably the ongoing Israeli occupation and the perpetual state of conflict, is crucial for achieving lasting progress in reconstruction.

Through this analysis, the paper contributes to the understanding of post-conflict reconstruction in Gaza, offering insights that are vital for shaping future strategies in rebuilding war-affected areas. This research aims to inform and guide effective approaches to post-conflict rebuilding, emphasising the need for comprehensive solutions that address both immediate and underlying challenges.

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