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# Navigating the Classroom

## Two Years After October 7

**An Educator's Resource**

January 2026





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## What This Document Is

This guide is designed for middle and high school educators seeking to navigate a complex, fast-changing landscape and make informed educational choices. It provides background on the recent ceasefire between Israel and Hamas (effective October 10, 2025), developments in Palestinian politics and statehood, evolving regional diplomacy, and current legal and humanitarian debates.

The guide offers a concise, evidence-based overview to help educators make informed choices and hold brave, honest conversations with students. It avoids simplistic binaries, identifies areas of uncertainty, and supports courageous, respectful classroom conversations and learning experiences.

## What This Document Isn't

This is not a lesson plan or classroom script. Rather, it's a concise reference to help you understand the most frequent claims, narratives, and questions that surface in discussions about the conflict so you can build your own lessons responsibly and with nuance.

## Five Lenses

A useful way to begin is by viewing the conflict through five distinct lenses, each highlighting a different dimension of reality.

1. The **security lens** concerns military aims, ceasefires, hostages, cross-border fire, and the risk of regional escalation.
2. The **humanitarian lens** focuses on civilian protection, displacement, aid and the broader human impact.
3. The **legal lens** involves courts, treaty obligations, and investigations – important in their own right but governed by different standards of evidence and timelines than daily news cycles.
4. The **diplomatic lens** covers recognition debates, normalization efforts, mediators, and broader interests that may not align with events on the battlefield.
5. Finally, the **information lens** examines who produces claims (governments, NGOs, UN agencies, and media), how claims are verified, and how narratives spread or harden even when evidence is incomplete.

Oversimplification occurs when reporting or slogans rely on just one lens while ignoring or minimizing others, and confusion sets in when multiple lenses are blurred together without acknowledgment.

Throughout this guide we'll return to these lenses to help cut through the noise. As new developments unfold, you can update facts within these lenses without needing to reinvent your framework: identify which lens a claim belongs to, state the evidence you're relying on, and say openly what you don't yet know. That combination models intellectual honesty and keeps your teaching grounded when the story shifts tomorrow. And it will. It always does.



# The Current Landscape

The present moment is less a single storyline than a braid of overlapping narratives, which can feel overwhelming to follow. Educators can help students untangle some of these narratives and put them in perspective.

## The Security Lens: A Fragile Ceasefire and an Uncertain Transition

Two years after Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack, Israel and Hamas entered Phase I of a U.S.-brokered ceasefire on October 10, 2025 — the first sustained, though fragile, pause in major combat operations since the war began. As of mid-January 2026, the agreement has formally transitioned to Phase II. The plan, backed by several Arab and Muslim governments, seeks to pause fighting, stabilize Gaza, and lay the groundwork for political and humanitarian reconstruction. However, as diplomacy confronts on-the-ground realities, the pathway to a durable and lasting resolution remains deeply challenging.

Under Phase I, fighting largely ceased, all twenty remaining living hostages were released in exchange for thousands of Palestinian prisoners, and Israeli forces withdrew from densely populated areas to a designated "yellow line," still controlling roughly half of Gaza's territory. As of this writing, Hamas has returned the bodies of all but one Israeli hostage killed in captivity, despite its obligation under the terms of the agreement to return all such remains and despite U.S. statements that Phase II implementation is contingent on full compliance with these obligations. The agreement also mandates large-scale international humanitarian assistance and the deployment of an international stabilization force — potentially involving countries such as Egypt, Turkey, Indonesia, and Azerbaijan — to oversee aid distribution, enforce demilitarization benchmarks, and prevent Hamas from rearming.

### **The ceasefire ended large-scale combat but left critical questions unresolved:**

1. Who governs Gaza during the transition?
2. How can true disarmament and security (for both Israelis and the residents of Gaza) be credibly enforced?
3. Who is prepared to confront Hamas if it resists?

At present, there is no functioning neutral or transitional administration in Gaza. Hamas has maintained or reasserted control in many areas vacated by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), exploiting the governance vacuum to regroup and restore its authoritarian hold. In areas where it has reasserted power, Hamas has also turned its violence inward. Reports from aid agencies, journalists, and Palestinian civilians describe the group imprisoning and publicly executing Gazans accused of "collaboration" or dissent. These actions stem from Hamas's effort to maintain absolute control, silence opposition, and project an image of defiance amid internal fractures and public anger over the devastation its October 7 attacks unleashed. By suppressing critics and monopolizing aid distribution, Hamas seeks to preserve its authority even at the expense of the very population it claims to defend.

This pattern of internal repression underscores a broader reality: the same dynamics that have long undermined Palestinian governance and reconciliation persist today. History offers little reassurance, considering that unity and governance arrangements between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority have repeatedly collapsed. Neither the PA nor international actors have yet demonstrated the capacity or willingness to forcibly disarm Hamas or prevent its regrouping. In other words, no one stands ready to confront Hamas's terror infrastructure directly.



As a result, delays and uncertainty surrounding the implementation of Phase II — intended to establish full demilitarization, withdrawal of Israeli forces, and reconstruction — have allowed Hamas to rebuild parts of its military infrastructure and violently reassert local control.

Phase II is where diplomacy meets reality, and where formal declarations now confront unresolved enforcement challenges. Its success will depend on credible enforcement, sustained pressure, and meaningful governance reform after Hamas. In practice, this effort will require a process of deep institutional reform and de-Hamasification in areas no longer under Israeli control, starting with dismantling Hamas's regime of fear and coercion. Following that step, Gaza will need civil institutions capable of governing transparently and serving the public rather than dominating it. Without that foundation, postwar reconstruction and long-term security for Israel are unlikely to succeed, as aid without demilitarization risks repeating past cycles of violence.

## Educator Guidance – The Security Lens:

### Core Themes to Emphasize

- a. **A ceasefire is not peace.** It pauses violence but leaves underlying political, military, and governance problems unresolved.
- b. **The governance vacuum is fundamentally a security problem.** Without a credible administrative authority in Gaza, diplomacy cannot advance beyond paper agreements. Without a functioning authority capable of enforcing order, armed terrorist groups — including Hamas — fill the void.
- c. **Security and humanitarian needs are interdependent.** Aid delivery, demilitarization, and civilian protection all depend on credible governance.
- d. **Hamas's ability to reassert control is tied to its coercive capacity.** Students should understand that Hamas's dominance comes from its armed forces, its internal security network, and its ability to punish dissent, not from democratic legitimacy.
- e. **Phase II of the ceasefire requires credible security enforcement.** Disarmament, monitoring, and preventing rearmament depend on actors with both will and capability — a combination currently lacking.

### Guiding Questions for Classroom Discussion / Reflection

- a. What problems does a ceasefire solve, and what problems does it leave unresolved?
- b. Which actors are responsible for enforcing the ceasefire's terms?
- c. Why is disarmament more than simply removing weapons, and what institutions would be needed to make it credible? What makes enforcement of disarmament difficult when a group like Hamas remains operational?
- d. What happens when no neutral or functional governing authority exists?
- e. What security lessons emerge from Hamas's rapid reconstitution in previously vacated areas?
- f. What risks do different parties face if enforcement fails?



### Clarifying Frequent Misconceptions

- a. **Misconception:** “The ceasefire means the conflict has ended and the threat has been neutralized.”  
**Clarify:** It is a pause, not a resolution. The drivers of conflict remain intact. Armed terrorist groups often use ceasefires to rebuild and prepare for the next round of violence.
- b. **Misconception:** “Control of territory equals stable governance.”  
**Clarify:** Armed control is not the same as administrative control and can even undermine it.
- c. **Misconception:** “Security concerns are strictly pro-Israel talking points.”  
**Clarify:** Post–October 7 trauma, history of rocket fire, and regional threats shape genuine Israeli public fears. Durable political agreements depend on security realities, not the reverse.
- d. **Misconception:** “ Hamas represents Palestinian public will.”  
**Clarify:** Many Gazans oppose Hamas but cannot safely express dissent. Again, governance ≠ popular legitimacy.
- e. **Misconception:** “Humanitarian issues are separate from security issues.”  
**Clarify:** In environments where terrorist groups control territory and resources, humanitarian access depends on security conditions.

### Further Resources:

- [Neomi Neumann and Devorah Margolin, ““Deradicalization” in Gaza: The Problem, the Solution, and the Measures of Success,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy \(2025\)](#)
- [Boundless Insights Podcast: Rebuilding Gaza without Rebuilding Hamas — with Ahmed Fouad Alkhatib \(2025\)](#)
- [The Center for Peace Communications](#)

## The Humanitarian Lens: Casualties, Food Insecurity, and Displacement

The war in Gaza has exacted a devastating humanitarian toll: tens of thousands of Palestinians were killed or injured in Gaza and there has been widespread displacement. Palestinian groups and many international observers have underscored the immense civilian suffering and widespread destruction, with some alleging Israeli war crimes. While assessments of civilian harm vary across organizations and debates continue over the reliability of available data, conditions in Gaza have been severe, with widespread humanitarian distress that continues to draw international concern. Israel facilitates regular aid deliveries, but access and distribution are deeply contested. Hamas and other groups have seized or taxed supplies and black markets put essentials out of reach. These factors make the humanitarian picture complex and difficult to evaluate with precision.

**Casualties:** The exact death toll remains unknown and disputed. Figures cited by international organizations largely originate from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians or clarify causes of death. Independent verification is limited. Military analyst John Spencer has noted that, based on available data, Israel’s combatant-to-civilian death ratio appears to be among the lowest recorded in modern urban warfare, reflecting extensive efforts to mitigate civilian harm despite Hamas’s practice of embedding its forces in civilian areas.<sup>1</sup> However, without transparent data, the precise ratio remains impossible to verify.

<sup>1</sup> [John Spencer, “Israel Has Created a New Standard in Urban Warfare. Why Will No One Admit It?” Newsweek \(2024\)](#)



**Food Insecurity:** From the earliest months of the war, major media outlets and some officials described Gaza as already “starving” or entering famine, often citing preliminary IPC (the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, a UN-backed initiative for analyzing and classifying food insecurity and malnutrition) alerts as if they were formal classifications. These early warnings were reported as established fact and shaped global opinion long before comprehensive data was available. In public debate, responsibility was frequently placed entirely on Israel, while little attention was given to Hamas’s longstanding diversion of aid, coercive control over distribution networks, and exploitation of humanitarian suffering for propaganda.

The debate sharpened after the IPC’s Famine Review Committee formally declared famine (IPC Phase 5) in Gaza in August 2025.<sup>2</sup> The finding was quickly disputed by Israel for lack of transparency and methodological clarity.<sup>3</sup> These disagreements highlighted how difficult it was to evaluate Gaza’s food-security conditions with confidence and how humanitarian assessments in highly politicized environments can themselves become contested.

The broader lesson is that humanitarian analysis must be urgent, precise, and strictly non-judgmental. Its purpose is to assess need, not to assign responsibility or blame. Once it crosses that line, humanitarian analysis can easily slip into public narratives that place all responsibility on Israel while overlooking Hamas’s diversion of aid and exploitation of civilian suffering for political gain. Gaza’s humanitarian suffering was real and severe, but politicized or partial narratives obscured the crisis rather than clarified it. In a conflict where information itself becomes a strategic tool, responsible reporting requires separating documented need, uncertainty in data, and intent so that humanitarian analysis supports genuine understanding rather than inflaming it. (The dynamics of this information war are explored further in the Information Lens section below.)

**Displacement:** Displacement of Gazans is widespread, driven both by IDF evacuation orders and by ongoing combat. Israel presents these orders as efforts to reduce harm by moving civilians out of combat zones. Importantly, most displacement in Gaza has been within its borders rather than across them.

Yet for many Gazans—descendants of refugees from the 1948 war—such orders evoke deep historical trauma and fears of permanent exile. Hamas has amplified these anxieties through rhetoric about a “Second Nakba,” framing temporary evacuations as part of an Israeli plan for ethnic cleansing. These fears are genuine within Palestinian society but are also politically instrumentalized by Hamas, which uses civilians as human shields to constrain Israeli military operations and stoke international outrage.

At the same time, reports tell of Hamas operatives threatening or physically blocking civilians attempting to flee. Allowing mass departures would weaken Hamas’s claim as Gaza’s “resistance government” and undermine its domestic and regional legitimacy. Neighboring Arab states, particularly Egypt and Jordan, have refused to accept Gaza residents, fearing permanent demographic change and accusations of complicity in displacement. Many other international actors oppose relocation abroad which they see as permanent expulsion. Together, these dynamics leave civilians trapped.

**Civilian Aspirations and the Search for Normalcy:** Amid the devastation, many ordinary Palestinians in Gaza express a desire not for continued resistance or ideological struggle, but for stability, dignity, and the chance to rebuild normal lives. Conversations gathered by journalists, aid organizations, and local NGOs reveal a population exhausted by cycles of war and repression, yearning for safety, reliable access to food and healthcare, functioning schools, and the freedom to work and move without fear.

For these civilians, political slogans matter less than the ability to live decently and provide for their families. They seek pragmatic governance that is accountable, focused on the well-being and future of the people of Gaza, and capable of connecting Gaza to the world through trade, education, and opportunity instead of tunnels and rockets. Their hopes underscore that humanitarian relief alone is not enough. Any sustainable peace must restore the political and economic conditions that allow ordinary Gazans to live with safety, agency, and hope.

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<sup>2</sup> [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification \(IPC\), “Famine Review Committee Report: Gaza Strip” \(August 22, 2025\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories & Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Politics Disguised as Science: Systematic Distortions in the IPC’s Gaza Report of August 2025” \(2025\)](#)



## Educator Guidance – The Humanitarian Lens:

### Core Themes to Emphasize

- a. **Humanitarian harm is real, severe, and difficult to measure precisely.** With many students having understandably strong reactions when seeing high death figures, educators can acknowledge the horrors of war while also reminding them that the accuracy of the figures is difficult to gauge, that data in conflict zones frequently lacks transparency, and that casualty figures, food insecurity metrics, and displacement statistics often come from contested or politicized sources.
- b. **Humanitarian analysis should identify need, not assign blame.** Once humanitarian reporting becomes moralized or politicized, it obscures rather than clarifies conditions on the ground.
- c. **Civilian suffering is shaped by many actors simultaneously.** This also includes Hamas and other terrorist groups controlling aid, blocking evacuations, and operating from civilian areas.
- d. **Ordinary civilians often seek stability and dignity over political slogans.** Highlight the distinction between the aims of Hamas and the daily aspirations of ordinary civilians.

### Guiding Questions for Classroom Discussion / Reflection

- a. Why is humanitarian data so difficult to verify in conflict zones?
- b. Why might different organizations report different numbers or trends?
- c. How can humanitarian reporting shape political narratives?
- d. How do regional politics and Hamas's own incentives shape what civilians can or cannot do and their access to aid?
- e. What do we learn from investigating the daily concerns and aspirations of ordinary Gazans? How does this differ from what popular slogans or political and militant leaders emphasize?

### Clarifying Frequent Misconceptions

- a. **Misconception:** "High casualty figures automatically mean Israel is intentionally targeting civilians."  
**Clarify:** Casualty numbers alone cannot show intent to harm civilians, especially in Gaza where Hamas embeds fighters, weapons, and tunnels in civilian areas and often operates in civilian clothing. Israel has taken measures such as precision striking, ground operations, evacuation warnings, and humanitarian corridors to reduce harm, but Hamas's tactics make it extremely difficult to distinguish combatants from civilians and complicate any assessment of responsibility.
- b. **Misconception:** "Displacement is simply Israel forcing Gazans to move."  
**Clarify:** Multiple actors shape displacement. The IDF issues evacuation orders to move civilians out of active combat zones in an effort to reduce harm. Hamas not only blocks civilians from leaving to retain leverage but also brings the fighting into civilian areas by operating from homes, schools, and other protected sites. Egypt refuses entry across its border, and many international actors oppose relocation abroad. All of these dynamics interact with deep historical fears within Palestinian society about permanent displacement.
- c. **Misconception:** "Humanitarian reporting is purely objective."  
**Clarify:** In highly politicized conflicts, assessments can be influenced by political pressure, incomplete data, or the agendas of armed groups controlling territory.





## Further Resources:

- [Gabriel Epstein, "Assessing the Gaza Death Toll After Eighteen Months of War," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, \(2025\)](#)
- [Ahmed F. Alkhatib, "Dispatch from 2,200 feet over Gaza: What I learned from airdropping desperately needed food aid," Atlantic Council \(2025\)](#)

## The Legal Lens: International Law, Ethnic Cleansing, and Genocide Allegations

International law draws crucial distinctions that help clarify what does—and does not—constitute genocide or ethnic cleansing. Evacuations intended to protect civilians can be lawful. By contrast, forcible transfer — the intentional, permanent removal of a population from its home — is a crime under international law. Large-scale displacement alone is therefore not evidence of ethnic cleansing. It meets that threshold only when there is demonstrable intent to make displacement permanent or when civilians are denied both protection and the right to return.

Under international law, genocide requires specific intent to destroy a group in whole or in part. Israel's stated goal is the defeat of Hamas, not the destruction of Palestinians. In practice, that means that the IDF has taken measures intended to minimize harm to civilians, such as issuing evacuation orders, creating humanitarian corridors, and facilitating aid deliveries. However, these efforts are often undercut by Hamas's deliberate use of the population as human shields: embedding its fighters, tunnels, and weapons beneath homes, schools, and hospitals, and preventing civilians from leaving combat zones. This is not to suggest that every Israeli action is justified, but rather that high civilian casualties, tragic as they are, do not in themselves constitute proof of genocidal intent. They reflect the grim and complex realities of urban warfare against a non-state actor that systematically embeds itself within civilian infrastructure.

When discussing international law, it is important to realize that legal processes run on different clocks than war or diplomacy, but they shape debate nonetheless. Provisional measures, investigations, and warrants are often reduced to slogans in public discourse that flatten complex realities.

### Educator Guidance – The Legal Lens:

#### Core Themes to Emphasize

- Legal terms have precise meanings.** Words like genocide and ethnic cleansing are legal categories governed by exact standards. They are not moral descriptors and should not be used as political slogans. Educators can clarify that conflating urban combat with a plan to eradicate a people stretches the concept of genocide beyond recognition, and when such terms are applied loosely, they often confuse more than clarify, trigger emotional reactions rather than careful judgment, turn complex conflicts into moral absolutes, and undermine genuine accountability.
- Intent is central to international law.** High civilian casualties, however tragic, do not by themselves prove war crimes or genocidal intent. International law assesses stated objectives, operational behavior, and patterns of conduct. Educators can help students separate emotional narratives from the standards of international law.
- Urban warfare complicates legal interpretation.** Combat in environments where Hamas embeds fighters, tunnels, and weapons among civilians makes legal assessment much more complex than casualty figures alone suggest. Educators can model critical thinking by emphasizing evidence, intent, and legal definitions rather than political rhetoric.



### Guiding Questions for Classroom Discussion / Reflection

- a. Why does international law place so much weight on intent rather than on outcomes alone?
- b. What types of evidence demonstrate intent under international law?
- c. When do legal terms become politicized, and how does that distort public understanding?
- d. What responsibilities do students have when using legal terms in classroom discussions?
- e. How does understanding legal standards change the way they interpret calls of genocide or ethnic cleansing?

### Clarifying Frequent Misconceptions

- a. **Misconception:** “Large numbers of civilian deaths automatically prove genocide.”  
**Clarify:** Genocide requires specific intent to destroy a group; high casualties in urban combat—especially where Hamas embeds in civilian areas—do not by themselves establish that intent. Israel has taken measures to reduce harm. One can debate whether those measures were sufficient or effective, but it is difficult to argue that they are consistent with genocidal intent.
- b. **Misconception:** “Evacuation orders are inherently a form of ethnic cleansing.”  
**Clarify:** Under international law, temporary evacuations for civilian protection can be lawful. Ethnic cleansing requires intent to make displacement permanent.
- c. **Misconception:** “If a claim is filed at the International Court of Justice or the International Criminal Court, wrongdoing is already established.”  
**Clarify:** Legal filings trigger investigations. They are not determinations of guilt.
- d. **Misconception:** “Using the word genocide is just another way of expressing moral outrage.”  
**Clarify:** Legal terms like genocide have precise definitions and evidentiary standards. Using them loosely distorts international law and undermines real accountability. It can also inflame public discourse, harden polarization, and contribute to hostility or violence. After all, when a crime as grave as genocide is alleged, people may feel that almost any response is justified, and that can escalate conflict rather than work to resolve it.

### Further Resources:

- [Michael Powell, “The Double Standard in the Human-Rights World,” The Atlantic \(2025\)](#)
- [John Spencer, “Israel Has Created a New Standard in Urban Warfare. Why Will No One Admit It?” Newsweek \(2024\)](#)
- [Dave Deptula, “On the Ground in Gaza: What I Saw of Israel’s Military Operations,” Forbes \(2024\)](#)
- [Jonah Goldberg, “The Headlines Said Amnesty International Accused Israel of Genocide. Here’s What They Missed,” American Enterprise Institute \(2024\)](#)
- [Amichai Cohen and Yuval Shany, “Critical Observations on Amnesty International’s Genocide Report,” Just Security \(2024\)](#)



## The Diplomatic Lens (Domestic): Fragmented Palestinian Leadership

The political landscape among Palestinians remains profoundly fragmented. The Palestinian Authority (PA) governs parts of the West Bank under a mandate undermined by the absence of elections, entrenched corruption, and growing internal and external demands to reform. Deeply unpopular, the PA is viewed by many Palestinians as ineffective or illegitimate. It is structured as a secular political body, tracing its roots to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Gaza, by contrast, is ruled by Hamas, a radical Islamist movement backed by Iran that merges theology with politics. Hamas won the last Palestinian legislative elections in 2006 and seized full control of Gaza in a violent coup the following year, expelling the PA.

Despite their ideological differences, both movements enshrine rejectionist positions toward Israel in their founding charters. [The Hamas Charter of 1988](#) calls explicitly for the destruction of Israel, the establishment of an Islamic state “on every inch of Palestine,” and views Jihad (holy war) as “the individual duty of every Moslem,” framing the conflict as a religious obligation. [The Palestinian National Charter of 1968](#), though amended in later years, still contains language denying the legitimacy of the Jewish state and affirming “armed struggle” as the means of liberation. Together, these frameworks — one religious and absolutist, the other nationalist and secular — illustrate how anti-Israel narratives remain embedded in both Islamist and secular Palestinian political traditions.

The brutal rivalry between Hamas and the PA shapes Palestinian public life in ways often missed in international coverage. This rivalry leaves Palestinians divided and weakens prospects for a unified leadership capable of negotiating peace or administering a future postwar Gaza.

## The Diplomatic Lens (Regional): The Roles and Interests of Key Actors

The Gaza conflict and its aftermath continue to reverberate across the Middle East, testing alliances, exposing rivalries, and reshaping regional priorities. The behavior of neighboring states and regional powers is guided less by ideology than by security imperatives, domestic pressures, and shifting geopolitical calculations.

### Egypt

Egypt plays an indispensable but precarious role. It controls the Rafah crossing (Gaza’s only non-Israeli border) and works in close coordination with Israel and the U.S. to contain Hamas, prevent weapons smuggling, and avert a refugee outflow that could destabilize its already fragile Sinai region. Cairo views Hamas not as a legitimate resistance movement but as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, which it designates as a terrorist organization. This position makes Egypt’s mediation essential yet cautious: it seeks stability in Gaza without empowering Hamas or appearing complicit in Israel’s campaign.

### Jordan

Jordan maintains deep security and intelligence cooperation with Israel. Yet with roughly half of its population of Palestinian origin, public sentiment remains overwhelmingly sympathetic to Palestinians, and the Hashemite Kingdom views its own stability as closely tied to developments in the West Bank. Amman therefore walks a careful line: advancing Palestinian interests in the West Bank and defending the sanctity of Jerusalem’s Islamic holy sites, while avoiding confrontation with Israel, on which it depends for water, energy, and security coordination.



## Qatar

Qatar plays a far more controversial role. On one hand, it has served as a key intermediary in hostage negotiations and humanitarian funding. On the other, it continues to bankroll Hamas and host its senior leadership in Doha, giving the group both financial lifelines and political legitimacy. Its state-funded broadcaster, Al Jazeera, amplifies deeply partisan regional narratives that reinforce anti-Israel sentiment and shape the wider information landscape.

## Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is cautiously recalibrating its regional strategy, weighing normalization with Israel while seeking credible progress toward Palestinian statehood and firm U.S. security guarantees, including defense cooperation and civilian nuclear support. Riyadh's posture reflects a broader Gulf trend: pragmatic engagement with Israel on security and technology, balanced against domestic and regional expectations to champion the Palestinian cause. The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, both signatories of the 2020 Abraham Accords, exemplify this new realism — one that favors stability, modernization, and countering Iran over the rhetoric of rejectionism.

## Iran

Iran remains the principal destabilizing actor in the regional equation. Through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), it funds, arms, and trains Hamas, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shi'a militias in Iraq and Syria, and the Houthis in Yemen — collectively branded the "Axis of Resistance." These groups coordinate attacks to stretch Israel's defenses across multiple fronts and advance Tehran's ideological project of eliminating Israel altogether.

The confrontation between Iran and Israel reached new heights in June 2025, when both engaged in a 12-day direct exchange of fire for the first time in their history. Israel targeted Iranian military assets in Syria and Iran, while U.S. precision strikes hit nuclear sites and IRGC bases in an effort to curb Tehran's ambitions to develop a nuclear weapon. Despite these setbacks, Iran's regional influence endures, sustained by proxy warfare, asymmetric tactics, and its growing partnership with Russia and China. The risk of further escalation remains acute, especially if Gaza's postwar governance falters or Hezbollah reconstitutes in Lebanon.

### Educator Guidance – The Diplomatic Lens

#### Core Themes to Emphasize:

- a. **Palestinian politics are deeply divided.** The PA and Hamas represent competing visions, governing structures, and ideological frameworks, resulting in a fractured political landscape with no unified negotiating authority.
- b. **Regional actors act out of strategy, not sentiment.** Each regional actor approaches Gaza and Israel through their own security concerns, domestic pressures, and geopolitical calculations. Peace or normalization between Arab countries and Israel reflect pragmatic interests.
- c. **The conflict is far larger than a simple Israel vs. Palestinians narrative.** What appears to be a bilateral dispute is in fact part of a much larger strategic landscape in which regional and global actors pursue their own interests, often shaping, sustaining, and using the conflict as a stage for competition, leverage, or legitimacy. These wider structures help explain why the conflict persists and why it cannot be understood through a simple narrative of powerful Israel versus powerless Palestinians. They make the familiar "two sides" framing deeply misleading in ways that obscure the deeper structural realities that constrain diplomacy.



### Guiding Questions for Classroom Discussion / Reflection

- a. What does it mean to negotiate without a unified Palestinian leadership? How do internal Palestinian divisions shape diplomatic possibilities?
- b. Why do some Arab states balance support for Palestinians with security cooperation with Israel?
- c. Why does Qatar simultaneously mediate hostage deals and support Hamas politically?
- d. How does Iran's regional strategy make negotiations harder?
- e. What changes when we view the conflict as a regional or even global one rather than a dispute between two sides? How does this expanded perspective challenge common activist or media narratives?

### Further Resources:

- [The Ceasefire in Gaza: Views on Security, Palestinian Governance, and Regional Dynamics, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy \(2025\)](#)
- [David Makovsky and Shira Efron, "For Progress in Gaza, Empower the Palestinian Authority," The National Interest \(2025\)](#)
- [Hussein Aboubakr Mansour, "There Is Actually No Solution," Middle East Forum \(2025\)](#)
- [Khaled Abu Toameh, "Does the Palestinian Authority Really Want to Return to Gaza?" Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs \(2024\)](#)

## The Information Lens: Narrative Is a Weapon, Too

The information environment now filters and distorts nearly every dimension of the conflict. Speed and emotion often override accuracy: claims move faster than verification, and first impressions harden into global narratives before evidence is checked. Some inaccuracies are later corrected — but only after shaping public perception. Examples include inflated casualty counts later revised, misattributed footage circulated as current, or viral videos that turn out to be lacking essential context. Allegations of famine show a similar pattern: early assessments and widely shared images were later challenged or retracted, but not before fueling moral outrage and influencing diplomatic pressure on Israel.

Much of what circulates online is not fabricated, but fragmented, decontextualized, or emotionally framed. Governments, NGOs, and media outlets (along with a sprawling ecosystem of influencers and activists) selectively amplify information that aligns with their agendas while minimizing or ignoring competing facts. This dynamic has turned information itself into a weapon of war, where narrative dominance can shape battlefield legitimacy, humanitarian aid flows, and even international law debates.

Hamas and its affiliates have long understood this asymmetry. Operating within civilian areas and controlling Gaza's main information channels, they exploit the absence of independent verification to present selective or distorted accounts that maximize international outrage. Israel, meanwhile, faces the challenge of communicating in a media environment skeptical of official narratives and shaped by imagery of suffering civilians. The result is a global discourse where truth competes with emotional resonance, and where perception — rather than evidence — often drives diplomatic and public outcomes.



## Educator Guidance – The Information Lens:

### Core Themes to Emphasize

- a. **Early claims are often provisional.** Students should learn to treat initial figures, warnings, videos, and claims as incomplete until independently verified.
- b. **Information in this conflict is fragmented, selective, and strategically framed.** Governments, NGOs, media outlets, influencers, and activists all amplify facts that match their agendas and downplay those that do not.
- c. **Emotions spread faster than facts.** Images and stories travel faster than corrections, shaping perceptions long before evidence is examined.
- d. **Educators must model intellectual humility and evidence-based reasoning.** Treat early numbers and reports as provisional, compare multiple credible sources, and make uncertainty explicit. The aim is not to silence discussion but to teach students how to slow down, question what they see, and ground analysis in methods that will still look responsible when the story shifts tomorrow.
- e. **Teach media literacy.** Each source carries biases and blind spots, including major international organizations and leading media outlets, which can, intentionally or not, amplify partial or politicized narratives. Educators can model how to trace information back to its original source, examine who collected it and under what conditions, and notice when different actors diverge in their claims. The goal is not to pick a “right” source, but to show how responsible knowledge-building depends on transparency, verification, and the courage to say, “we don’t yet know.”

### Guiding Questions for Classroom Discussion / Reflection

- a. How can speed distort accuracy in wartime reporting?
- b. How can agenda-driven amplifications shape public opinion and diplomatic pressure?
- c. Have you seen a powerful image or claim go viral before being verified?
- d. Why is it difficult to revise one’s views after initial impressions are set?

### Clarifying Frequent Misconceptions

- a. **Misconception:** “If a major outlet reported it, it must be verified.”  
**Clarify:** Even reputable outlets repeat early numbers or claims that later prove incomplete or misleading.
- b. **Misconception:** “If something is emotionally powerful, it must be true.”  
**Clarify:** Emotional resonance is not evidence. Narratives often spread because they evoke outrage, not because they are accurate.
- c. **Misconception:** “If reports differ, someone must be lying or manipulating information.”  
**Clarify:** In fast-moving conflicts, many discrepancies come from limited access, speed, or incomplete data — not deliberate deception. At the same time, media outlets often highlight information that supports their preferred narratives while downplaying or ignoring competing facts.



## Further Resources:

- [Robert Satloff, "Truth Is Hard to Get in Gaza," Wall Street Journal \(2025\)](#)
- [Boundless Insights Podcast: The Media's War on Israel — with Matti Friedman \(2025\)](#)
- [Olivia Reingold and Tanya Lukyanova, "They Became Symbols for Gazan Starvation. But All 12 Suffer from Other Health Problems," The Free Press \(2025\)](#)
- [Matti Friedman, "When We Started to Lie," The Free Press \(2024\)](#)
- [Matti Friedman, "An Insider's Guide to the Most Important Story on Earth," Tablet Magazine \(2014\)](#)
- [Matti Friedman, "What the Media Gets Wrong About Israel," The Atlantic \(2014\)](#)

# The Debate Over Recognition of a Palestinian State

## Why Now?

During the summer of 2025, recognition of a Palestinian state reemerged as a major diplomatic initiative. A growing number of countries—particularly in Europe, including Britain and France—announced their intention to recognize Palestinian statehood. Proponents argued that the humanitarian crisis in Gaza compelled new diplomatic approaches, that delaying statehood further undermined moderate Palestinian voices and strengthened extremists, and that recognition offered a nonviolent expression of Palestinian national self-determination already endorsed by much of the international community. Initially, many of these recognitions were described as conditional, accompanied by calls for Palestinian Authority reform, improved governance, and eventual negotiations with Israel. Yet in practice, some countries granted symbolic recognition of a Palestinian state without any of these conditions being met.

In November 2025, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2803, endorsing a U.S.-backed Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict and authorizing the establishment of a temporary International Stabilization Force in Gaza under a newly created Board of Peace. Adopted by a vote of 13–0, with China and Russia abstaining, the resolution focused on post-war stabilization, demilitarization, humanitarian access, and transitional governance in Gaza, rather than on recognition of Palestinian statehood itself. The Council authorized the Force to secure territory, oversee demilitarization, protect civilians, and ensure humanitarian aid delivery, while linking an eventual phased Israeli military withdrawal to agreed security benchmarks, including demilitarization standards. The resolution also placed Gaza under a transitional international authority through the Board and authorized associated civil and security entities through 31 December 2027, subject to biannual reporting to the Council. This resolution implicitly reinforced a sequencing logic widely articulated by its sponsors and supporters: that durable political progress, including a future two-state outcome, requires prior stabilization, demilitarization of Gaza, exclusion of Hamas from governance, and the emergence of credible Palestinian governing institutions capable of exercising authority and maintaining security. In this sense, the resolution does not foreclose Palestinian statehood but conditions it: It places the burden on Palestinian political actors to demonstrate readiness for sovereignty and aligns international recognition with concrete progress rather than aspirational gestures.

## Why Recognition Remains Controversial

The controversy surrounding recognition is rooted primarily in the fragmented and dysfunctional Palestinian political landscape. The Palestinian Authority governs parts of the West Bank but suffers from deep legitimacy





deficits, corruption, and a lack of democratic renewal, while Hamas (a designated terrorist organization by much of the international community) continues to control Gaza. This division means there is no unified, legitimate leadership capable of exercising sovereign authority.

Hamas's record in Gaza underscores these concerns. Since violently seizing control in 2007, Hamas has prioritized armed resistance and ideological domination over institution-building and civilian governance. Its rule has been marked by authoritarian repression, systematic corruption, diversion of international aid toward military infrastructure, and the embedding of armed assets within civilian areas. Rather than laying the groundwork for sovereignty, Hamas has eroded the very institutions necessary for a viable state. This has contributed to permanent conflict and ultimately to Gaza's economic collapse and humanitarian crisis.

From the perspective of Israel and the United States, these realities reinforce a long-standing position that sovereignty cannot precede governance and security. The November 2025 Security Council resolution effectively codified this view in international law. It reflects the principle that recognizing a state without unified authority, demilitarization, and institutional capacity would risk legitimizing violent actors, rewarding terrorism, and creating a failed or proxy state vulnerable to Iranian influence and regional destabilization.

## The Larger Question

The recognition debate has therefore shifted from one of symbolism and timing to one of sequence and substance. The core question is no longer whether Palestinian statehood is legitimate in principle (most international actors accept that it is) but whether statehood should be granted in advance of reform or only as a result of it.

The November 2025 resolution answers this decisively: statehood must come last, not first. Recognition is framed not as a tool to force reform, but as the reward for achieving it. True sovereignty requires more than diplomatic declarations. It depends on functioning and accountable institutions, a unified and legitimate political leadership, and the absence of independent armed forces. Without these elements, recognition risks producing a symbolic state lacking substance, stability, or responsibility under international law.

### Educator Guidance:

#### Core Themes to Emphasize

- a. **Recognition is not the same as sovereignty.** Any future Palestinian state will have to navigate complex realities in governance, reform, and security. Students should understand that statehood requires functioning institutions, unified leadership, and the ability to govern securely. These conditions cannot be created through diplomatic statements alone. A state must be able to deliver services, maintain order, and restrain armed groups.
- b. **The Palestinian political landscape is fragmented.** The unpopular PA governs parts of the West Bank while Hamas coercively controls Gaza. This division means no single entity currently represents Palestinians.
- c. **Statehood without capacity risks instability.** Educators can emphasize that premature sovereignty may produce the very conditions associated with failed states: weak institutions, armed groups operating outside state control, corruption, and susceptibility to external influence. In such circumstances, statehood becomes symbolic rather than functional, unable to provide security or services for its people.





### Guiding Questions for Classroom Discussion / Reflection

- a. What do governments hope to achieve by recognizing a Palestinian state now? Why have European states extended recognition even while acknowledging the lack of conditions on the ground?
- b. Should sovereignty be a tool to encourage reform, or come only after demonstrated capacity? What responsibilities do other nations have when recognizing a state whose institutions are incomplete?
- c. What institutions must exist before a state can function responsibly? What conditions make a state viable and accountable to its people?
- d. How do political fragmentation and competing armed groups affect the prospects for sovereignty?

### Clarifying Frequent Misconceptions

- a. **Misconception:** "Recognition automatically creates a state."  
**Clarify:** Statehood depends on institutions, political unity, security capacity, and territorial control — not diplomatic gestures alone.
- b. **Misconception:** " Hamas and the PA would govern a state together."  
**Clarify:** They are rival authorities with incompatible visions. Unified governance is currently impossible.
- c. **Misconception:** "Recognition rewards moderation."  
**Clarify:** With no unified Palestinian leadership, recognition may unintentionally strengthen actors who reject coexistence.
- d. **Misconception:** "Critics of recognition oppose Palestinian rights."  
**Clarify:** Many argue that premature sovereignty undermines Palestinians by creating a failed state lacking institutions needed to protect its people.

### Further Resources:

- [Tal Becker, Samer Sinijlawi, Isabelle Lasserre, "Recognizing "Palestine": Rationale, Expectations, Implications," Washington Institute for Near East Policy \(2025\)](#)
- [Dennis Ross, "Recognising a Symbolic Palestinian State Will Only Help Israel's Far Right Block a Real One," Washington Institute for Near East Policy \(2025\)](#)
- [Souhira Medini, "Palestine Recognition Boosts the PA, Not Hamas," Al Majalla \(2025\)](#)

## Principles for Constructive Educational Discussion

Teaching about Israel, Palestinians, and regional geopolitics is not about offering answers so much as helping students understand key terms and learn how to ask better questions and handle complexity. For educators, the



challenge is to create a brave space where multiple perspectives can be weighed without sliding into slogans or prejudice.<sup>4</sup> The following principles can guide that work.

## Complexity and Multiple Perspectives

There is no single “Israeli view” or “Palestinian view.” Both societies are fractured along political, religious, generational, and other lines. Regional actors from Iran to Egypt to the U.S bring their own agendas. Emphasizing this diversity helps students see the conflict as a web of competing interests rather than a binary struggle or a zero-sum game (pro-Palestine vs. pro-Israel).

## Balancing the Security and Humanitarian Lenses

For Israelis, the memory of repeated wars, rocket fire, terrorism, and especially the trauma of October 7, 2023 is central to public opinion and policymaking. Ignoring these realities risks caricaturing and even demonizing Israeli motives. Acknowledging them does not require endorsing every policy, but it does mean taking security concerns seriously.

At the same time, the humanitarian toll in Gaza has been staggering: tens of thousands of Palestinians were killed or injured in Gaza and there has been widespread displacement. Students should understand that humanitarian suffering is not incidental but an inherent part of war itself. This is precisely why war is feared, why it demands moral seriousness, and why every responsible actor must ultimately work to end it.

Yet history reminds us that we do not live in a utopian world where peace is always possible. At times, war emerges as an unavoidable response to aggression or when terrorist groups reject coexistence. Recognizing this reality should not desensitize us to its pain, but rather deepen our sense of urgency to prevent, limit, and end conflict wherever possible.

There remains a legitimate and difficult debate about how to end this war in a way that does not sow the seeds of the next one. That requires balancing two vital perspectives: the humanitarian lens, which prioritizes the protection of civilians, and the security lens, which seeks to prevent future violence by dismantling the conditions and actors that perpetuate it. People may reasonably weigh these lenses differently. Understanding and debating that balance, without demonizing those who see it another way, is essential to civic and moral maturity and to any honest conversation about war, peace, and responsibility.

## Critical Media Literacy

Information often moves faster than verification. In the digital age, images, videos, and statistics circulate before they can be confirmed, and artificial intelligence has made this even more complicated. AI-generated videos, altered photos, and fabricated “eyewitness” accounts can look authentic while being entirely false. This makes critical thinking and verification essential skills for students navigating today’s information landscape.

Students should be encouraged to ask: Who produced this claim? What evidence supports it? What it emphasizes or leaves out? Has it been verified, revised, or challenged by another source? Learning to slow down, cross-check information, and look for corroboration builds resilience against propaganda and helps them distinguish fact from narrative.

One practical tool is the [CRAAP Test](#), a simple framework for evaluating information based on Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose. Using it encourages students to think about when something was published, why it was created, and who stands behind it. Practicing this habit equips them to navigate media and social media responsibly.

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<sup>4</sup> Arao, Brian, and Kristi Clemens. “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice.” In *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators*, edited by Lisa Landreman, 135–150. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2013.



## Intellectual Humility and Epistemic Responsibility

In a conflict where data is contested, motives are debated, and first impressions often turn out to be incomplete or wrong, students must learn the value of intellectual humility and epistemic responsibility—the practice of being careful and accountable in how we form and update our beliefs, including slowing down, checking sources, and resisting the urge to jump to conclusions. Educators can model how responsible judgment requires acknowledging uncertainty, recognizing the limits of one’s knowledge, and resisting the pressure to form immediate, simple conclusions. This practice does not weaken moral clarity but strengthens it by grounding convictions in evidence rather than impulse. Humility also helps students remain open to revision as new facts emerge, a crucial skill in any rapidly evolving or emotionally charged context.

## Criticism vs. Prejudice

Because identities and histories are at stake, it is essential to distinguish criticism of policies from prejudice against people. Robust, legitimate critique names decisions, doctrines, or behaviors and anchors them in evidence. Argumentation crosses into antisemitism or anti-Arab/anti-Muslim bigotry when it slides into collective blame, classic tropes, dehumanizing or demonizing language, or double standards that deny one people a right otherwise afforded to others. Keeping that boundary explicit protects students and staff while preserving space for brave conversations.

## Avoid Binary Framing (Pro-Israel vs. Pro-Palestine)

The recognition debate points to the larger challenge of imagining a resolution for the conflict. For students, the key is learning to hold complexity and see that both peoples carry legitimate needs and fears and that progress cannot come at the total expense of the other. This is not a football match where one side wins and the other loses. The only sustainable path forward is one where Israelis and Palestinians find a way to live side by side with dignity, security, and mutual recognition. Helping students keep that larger horizon in mind prevents discussions from collapsing into partisanship and hateful slogans.

## Teach How to Think; Not What to Think

The goal is not to take sides or to solve the conflict ourselves, but to guide students in examining evidence, questioning assumptions, and recognizing multiple perspectives. Encourage them to practice empathy without losing analytical rigor, to separate moral conviction from factual inquiry, and to hold complexity without collapsing into cynicism or shallow slogans. In an environment where information and emotion often collide, educators can model curiosity, fairness, and intellectual integrity, all skills that matter far beyond this particular conflict.



# Appendix: Possible Activities

This guide is not a lesson plan, but educators may find value in steering students toward comparative and inquiry-based activities that encourage them to hold complexity and keep the larger goal of peace in view. For example:

## Case Studies Across History

Have students compare key diplomatic efforts or conflict milestones (e.g., the Oslo Accords, the Abraham Accords, the Gaza Disengagement, recent recognition debates). Ask: what was each trying to achieve, what conditions were present or missing, and why did outcomes differ?

## Model Discussion

Instead of a traditional debate, stage a session where students represent different stakeholders (Israel, Palestinians/the Palestinian Authority, the U.S., Arab states, the EU, the UN, and NGOs). Each delegation presents its position on recognition and/or conflict resolution, followed by moderated discussion and draft “resolutions.” The emphasis is on listening, negotiating, and understanding competing priorities, not scoring points.

## Journalist for a Day

Assign students to cover a current event from multiple angles (Israeli, Palestinian, regional, international) and by consulting different media outlets. They should highlight not only the facts but also the narratives that shape how each side explains the event.

## Media Literacy Lab

Provide students with two or three conflicting reports on the same event. Ask them to check for verification or corrections and compare how different outlets present the story. The task is not necessarily to decide which source is more reliable but more to notice how language, emphasis, and framing vary. For example, which details are highlighted, which are minimized, and what tone is used. Students should understand that different outlets often carry their own agendas or audiences in mind, and that recognizing these agendas is part of becoming a critical consumer of information.

## “Unpack the Assumption” Workshop

Students examine a claim commonly heard in public discourse (e.g., “A two-state solution is impossible,” “Israel is committing genocide,” “Critics of recognition oppose Palestinian rights,” “Israel is solely responsible for the crisis,” “ Hamas represents Palestinians,” etc.). For each claim, students identify assumptions (what must be true for the claim to hold), missing context (what the claim omits), alternative interpretations (other ways the same facts could be read), and what evidence would clarify it. This activity trains students to spot simplifications and encourages more nuanced, less slogan-driven thinking.