University of Kent

Kent Academic Repository

Voller, Yaniv (2025) ***Clans and order in post-conflict Gaza: Recommendations For UK stakeholders.*** **Other. UK Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee**

Downloaded from
https://kar.kent.ac.uk/115096/ The University of Kent's Academic Repository KAR

The version of record is available from
https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/132870/pdf/

This document version
Publisher pdf

DOI for this version

Licence for this version
CC BY (Attribution)

Additional information

Versions of research works

Versions of Record
If this version is the version of record, it is the same as the published version available on the publisher's web site. Cite as the published version.

Author Accepted Manuscripts
If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding. Cite as Surname, Initial. (Year) 'Title of article'. To be published in ***Title of Journal*** , Volume and issue numbers [peer-reviewed accepted version]. Available at: DOI or URL (Accessed: date).

Enquiries
If you have questions about this document contact ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in KAR. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our Take Down policy (available from https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies).

Clans and Order in Post-Conflict Gaza: Recommendations For UK Stakeholders

Written evidence submitted by Yaniv Voller (IPC0006)
Foreign Affairs Committee
Inquiry: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

I am a Senior Lecturer in Middle East Politics with extensive experience in studying the role of clans, tribes and other kinship communities in conflicts across the Middle East, including Israel/Palestine, Iraq, Syria, and Sudan. Therefore, I am well placed to respond to this inquiry on how the UK and its allies can help to achieve a ceasefire and lasting end to the war in Gaza and Lebanon.

A. Executive summary

A.1. The collapse of Hamas in Gaza has raised critical questions about the nature of political and social order post-violence.

A.2. Israeli officials proposed establishing a council of clan leaders to run Gaza's civilian affairs. Experts debunked this proposal, noting the clans' diminished influence among urbanised Palestinians, as well as the involvement of some clans in illicit activities or their involvement with Islamic Jihad and even the Islamic State in Sinai.

A.3. However, despite urbanisation, clans remain important for many Palestinians. Moreover, lessons from other states in the region suggest that kinship structures regain appeal in crises.

A.4. While some clans have histories of illicit activities, others have cooperated with the Palestinian Authority and integrated into state institutions.

A.5. Most importantly, Gazan clans have gained influence post-Hamas. Some have engaged in criminal activities, such as looting aid convoys. Others have sought to curb such acts and introduce order in their localities.

A.6. Stakeholders, including the UK government and bodies involved in Gaza's reconstruction and stabilisation efforts must consider clans' interests to ensure their support in the process.

A.7. British stakeholders have gained experience in working with tribes in Iraq and should use their insights to bring stability to post-conflict Gaza.

B. Background: Gazan Clans in Politics and Society

B.1. Hamas's collapse following Israel's launch of Operation Iron Swords in retaliation for Hamas's onslaught on the 7th of October raised critical questions about who shall govern Gaza after violence ends and reconstruction begins. An early suggestion by Israeli officials was to establish a council of clan leaders to replace Hamas in running civilian affairs in the Strip. This recommendation relied on the traditional role of Palestinian clans in managing community affairs in Palestine.[1] These suggestions have encountered fierce criticism from experts and commentators inside and outside Israel. Some have emphasised that the clan is an archaic form of organisation that has lost much of its appeal to the urbanising Palestinian population.[2] Others have reminded Israeli decision-makers about the history of the Gazan clans' involvement in illicit activities, including smuggling and human trafficking. Others have pointed out the collaboration between notable Gazan clans and the Islamic Jihad, and even al-Qa'eda, as was the case of the Doghmush clan.[3] Most importantly, clan leaders have declared their reluctance to assume such a role.[4]

B.2. While the idea of a clan council is far-fetched, the discussion brought attention back to the Gazan clans. Although the clans have lost some of their centrality in Palestinian social life, they remain an essential source of identity for many Palestinians and play an important role in Palestinian politics. Not only in Gaza but also in the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has often negotiated with notable clans and sought to co-opt them into the system of governance.[5] Though it is true that Gazan clans have often been involved in criminal activities, which put them on a collision course with Hamas,[6] at other times, Hamas, like the PA, has benefitted from the clans' networks and capabilities.[7] And whereas some clans have

---

[1] Nidal Al-Mughrabi, Emily Rose & Matt Spetalnick, 'Insight: Israel's Next Headache: Who Will Run Post-War Gaza?' *Reuters*, 3 July 2024, https://tinyurl.com/282x4jjt.
[2] Dror Ze'evi, 'Clans and Militias in Palestinian Politics,' *Crown Center for Middle East Studies Middle East Brief* 26 (2008).
[3] Jean Pierre-Filiu, 'Netanyahu's Losing Gamble on Gaza Clans,' *Le Monde*, 8 April 2024, https://tinyurl.com/ykr8pw8a; Muhammad Shehada, 'How Israel is Aiding Armed Gangs in Gaza to Sow Societal Collapse', *The New Arab*, 26 November 2024, https://tinyurl.com/2pnzy3ha.
[4] The Times of Israel, 'Israel Wants Local Clans to Run Gaza after the War. But the Candidates are Refusing,' 2 July 2024, https://tinyurl.com/568yd2ah.
[5] Ze'evi, 'Clans and Militias in Palestinian Politics,' p. 2.
[6] Jon Swain, 'Hamas Fights Crime Clans for Total Control of Gaza, *The Sunday Times*, 24 June 2007, https://tinyurl.com/4ma3pjua.
[7] International Crisis Group, 'Inside Gaza: The Challenge of Clans and Families,' *Middle East Report*

collaborated not only with Hamas but also with the Islamic Jihad and even Islamic State cells in the Sinai Peninsular, other clans, such as the Helles, have supported the PA and sought to restore its capacity in the Gaza Strip.

B.3. Perhaps most importantly, Gazan clans have already become more visible and influential on the ground.[8] Recent months have witnessed growing organised criminality, mainly in the form of extorting and looting of aid convoys entering Gaza. Gangs linked to clans in the Rafah region, such as the Abu Shabab and Soufi families, have been the main culprits behind these incidents.[9] These gangs then transferred the looted goods to warehouses to sell in the black market. That these lootings have taken place in areas under direct IDF control has brought commentators to suggest that the IDF has known of such actions and enabled them by not taking any action, an accusation the IDF has denied.[10]

B.4. Regardless of whether the IDF allowed such actions to happen, and although the looting of aid and racketeering are clearly abhorrent, these actions demonstrate that clans can mobilise people and use infrastructure to take over Gaza's economy. Moreover, while some clans, or clan members, have engaged in criminal activity, others, such as the Helles and al-Astal clans, have sought to counter such activities, restore order in their territories, and bring back the PA to Gaza.[11] In short, amid the violence and chaos that have characterised Gaza since the outbreak of violence, Gazan clans have proven themselves not only more visible and impactful but also one of the few forces in the Strip that are capable of organised action.

B.5. The reality in Gaza should not surprise those who have followed other civil wars in the Middle East. At times of state collapse, tribal and family frames become a haven and a network of support for affected individuals. In Iraq, Syria, and Yemen,

---

71, 20 December 2007, https://tinyurl.com/5xajw9c4.

[8] Yaniv Voller, 'The Inevitable Role of Clans in Post-Conflict Stabilization in Gaza' *War on the Rocks*, 24 May 2024, https://warontherocks.com/2024/05/the-inevitable-role-of-clans-in-post-conflict-stabilization-in-gaza/

[9] Malaika Kanaaneh Tapper & Jana Tauschinski, 'How Gangsters Took Over Gaza's Aid Routes,' *Financial Times* 20 November 2024, https://www.ft.com/content/6a039600-d4f3-4aaa-ae0f-e4ca72cf2268.

[10] Nir Hasson & Yaniv Kubovich, 'The Israeli Army Is Allowing Gangs in Gaza to Loot Aid Trucks and Extort Protection Fees From Drivers,' *Haaretz*, 11 November 2024, https://tinyurl.com/4b4mxr5v.

[11] Zvi Bar'el, 'Israel Seeks to Let Armed Gangs Control Gaza, but Could Find Hamas Back in Charge, *Haaretz*, 22 March 2024, https://tinyurl.com/mwtp7625; Jackie Houri, 'While Waiting for News from Cairo, Gazans Operate to Protect Incoming Aid,' *Haaretz*, 12 December 2024, https://tinyurl.com/kspawt6y (in Hebrew).

for example, clan and tribal structures resurged following the eruption of civil wars that devastated the central governments.[12] The failure of governments in these countries to engage with tribes and clans in post-conflict has driven the latter to join repeating insurgencies or at least refuse to collaborate with the state and its institutions.[13] In contrast, governments capable of co-opting and mobilising tribal and clan elements in society have proven more successful in counterinsurgency and restoring order.

Recommendation: Stakeholders involved in resolving the conflict in Gaza must pay careful attention to clan dynamics in Gaza, amid the collapse of the Hamas government and other social institutions in the Strip.

C. What can be learned from the record of UK Government policies to date?

C.1. Various British institutions have gained extensive experience in recent decades working with tribes, clans, and other kinship groups in war-torn societies. In Iraq, for example, during the first wave of insurgency, British officers and civilian representatives in the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) engaged closely with tribes across the country, whether in the predominantly Shi'a south or, along with their American coalition partners, in predominantly Sunni governorates such as al-Anbar, Salah al-Din, and Diyala. As part of the efforts to restore order amid the violence that erupted following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's Ba'th regime, the British, along with their coalition partners, built alliances with tribal leaders in the country, enlisted tribes to counterinsurgency forces, and used tribal structures to consolidate local council and political formations.[14]

C.2. In Afghanistan, too, the British engaged closely with tribal structures as part of the NATO-led efforts to rebuild the state, restore order, and create security agencies

---

[12] Syria and Iraq are two common examples of the resurgence of tribalism amid the collapse of the central state. See Yaniv Voller, 'Rethinking Armed Groups and Order: Syria and the Rise Of Militiatocracies', *International Affairs* 98, 3 (2022): 853-871; Shmuel Bar, 'The Re-Tribalisation of the Middle East,' *Comparative Strategy* 39, 2 (2020), 128-144.

[13] Carter Malkasian, Illusions of Victory: The Anbar Awakening and the Rise of the Islamic State (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 180-181.

[14] Jack Fairweather, *A War of Choice: The British in Iraq 2003-9* (London: Random House); Mark Wilbanks & Efraim Karsh, 'How the "Sons of Iraq" Stabilized Iraq,' *Middle East Quarterly* 17, 4 (2010), 57-70.

to fight the Taliban's resurgence.[15] In the region of Helmand, where British forces have led NATO operations, British officers regularly consulted with clan leaders, using military bases to hold gatherings and tribal *shuras*, whether on coordinating actions against the Taliban or the harvesting and trading of poppies, which is directly linked with drug trade.[16]

C.3. The experiences of British officials, armed forces, and non-government organisations in the contexts of Iraq and Afghanistan are not free of controversy, and the situation in both countries is far from representing a picture of peace and stability. Moreover, Gaza clearly represents a different context to that of Iraq and Afghanistan. Nevertheless, these experiences are still valuable as they signal the sensitivity with which stakeholders of various backgrounds should deal with complex societies where traditional social structures and institutions prevail.

Recommendation: British stakeholders and participants in Gaza's reconstruction and stabilisation must consult with their peers who have gained experience in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other contexts. Although Gaza represents a different environment to that of Iraq and Afghanistan, the resurgence of tribalism and clannism in these different environments has stemmed from similar causes and raised comparable challenges to reconstruction and conflict resolution.

D. How can the UK assure the resilience of efforts to bring about a lasting peace at a time of uncertainty caused by conflicts elsewhere and changes in leadership in the international community?

D.1. The UK is a close ally of Israel but is also held in high esteem by the Palestinian Authority and many Palestinians. In light of the extensive experience of the UK government and British individuals in conflict zones, advising governments, and training armed forces and civilian agencies across the globe, it is likely, and highly desirable, that British individuals, organisations, and government agencies take part in Gaza's reconstruction stabilisation, once violence subsides. This participation will

[15] James Pritchard & M.L.R. Smith, 'Thompson in Helmand: Comparing Theory to Practice in British Counter-insurgency Operations in Afghanistan,' *Civil Wars* 12, 1-2 (2010), 65-90;
[16] Robert Johnson, 'Managing Helmand province: From Bost to Bastion,' *International Area Studies Review* 15, 3 (2012), 279–300

be in partnership with international actors, whether Arab, Asian, or Western governments, aid agencies, and international organisations.

D.2. While the ideal solution for Israel/Palestine still relies on the two-state solution and the creation of a prosperous Palestinian state, side-by-side with a secure Israel as a national home to the Jewish people, such a goal could only be achieved once peace and stability are restored in Gaza. British support for Gaza's reconstruction and a long and stable peace in the region may take various shapes. British advisors and practitioners, either in formal or informal, non-state capacity, will be welcomed to participate in international programmes and support any peacekeeping force that will facilitate Gaza's recovery, whether local or international.

D.3. British representatives on the ground must utilise experience in other conflict zones and consider the ways in which Gazan clans will be integrated into peace-building processes, reconstruction projects, and the restoration of security in the Strip. Given the dire economic and political situation in Gaza, it is hard to envisage a reality in which the illicit economy, particularly smuggling and trafficking through tunnels from Egypt into the Gaza Strip, will cease to exist. Rather than fighting this economy, stakeholders, including the UK, must offer alternative options for clan re-integration into Gaza's emerging political and economic system, through opportunities in the security forces, administration, and local governance.

Recommendations: British participants in Gaza's reconstruction must familiarise themselves with the clans operating across the Strip, particularly in Rafah and Khan Yunis, which are close to Gaza's borders with Egypt and Israel, respectively and where clan activities are particularly notable. The post-conflict reconstruction and stabilisation participants in Gaza must also study the different clan dynamics and local practices and engage with clan leaders across the Strip. While the selection of officials and security providers should ideally based on merit, it is still critical to consult and address grievances of clan members and leaders and pursue that will allow clan members to take part in state institutions, local police and other security forces, and in the non-governmental and private sectors, Such attention to the clans, their demands, and their influence, will reduce the rise of their defection to elements operating against peace and security in Gaza, whether Hamas or others.

Summary and General Recommendations

Amid the collapse of order and governance in Gaza, local clans have become more influential. While some have used their power and contacts with Israeli authorities and the IDF to expand their criminal activities and networks, others have sought to maintain order and prepare the ground for the potential PA's return. The resurgence of clan structures in Gaza mirrors similar patterns seen in other Middle Eastern conflicts, where clans provide support networks during state collapse. The British experience in Iraq and Afghanistan highlights the importance of engaging with tribal structures to restore order, despite the controversies and differences in context. The UK government and non-governmental actors are likely to take some part in Gaza's reconstruction and should bring their insights and experience in similar settings to Gaza.

Recommendations:

1. **Engage with Clan Dynamics**: Stakeholders in Gaza should pay close attention to clan dynamics, recognising their potential to mobilise people and influence the economy.

2. **Learn from British Experience**: British stakeholders should consult with peers experienced in Iraq and Afghanistan to understand the complexities of working with clans in conflict zones.

3. **Integrate Clans into Reconstruction**: Efforts should be made to integrate clans into Gaza's political and economic systems, offering opportunities in security forces, administration, and local governance.

4. **Address Clan Grievances**: It is crucial to consult and address the grievances of clan members and leaders to prevent their defection to opposing elements.

5. **Familiarise with Local Clans**: British participants should familiarise themselves with the clans operating in Gaza, particularly in Rafah and Khan Yunis, and engage with clan leaders to ensure effective reconstruction and stabilisation efforts.

This approach will help leverage the influence of clans in Gaza to support peace-building and reconstruction efforts.

I would be pleased to speak further about my response. Please contact me at…..

17th December 2024