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Whither the Board of Peace? Perspectives from Washington and the Gulf

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Editor

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Editor's Note

The Board of Peace (BoP), launched in January 2026 at Davos under United States (US) President Donald Trump's chairmanship, represents an unprecedented experiment in conflict resolution: an American-led multilateral framework operating outside the United Nations system, funded through membership fees, and premised on the (unstated) principle that money and military strength can forge peace where diplomacy has failed.

The BoP emerged from Trump's 20-point peace plan for Gaza, adopted under UN Security Council Resolution 2803 in November 2025. Trump signed the Board's founding charter on 22 January 2026 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, with representatives from 28 countries. At its inaugural meeting on 19 February 2026 in Washington, DC, the Peace Board unveiled over US$17 billion in pledges from nine countries and secured troop commitments for an International Stabilization Force. Despite these pledges, however, the initiative faces a severe cash crunch. News reports reveal that the BoP has received only a tiny fraction of the US$17 billion promised, effectively stalling reconstruction and preventing the US-backed National Committee for the Administration of Gaza from entering the Strip. Compounding these financial troubles are various other obstacles, including Hamas's refusal to disarm, Israeli territorial encroachment beyond agreed boundaries, and marginalised Palestinian representation in governance decisions. Most strikingly, the BoP's launch coincided with Operation Epic Fury—Trump's war against Iran—raising fundamental questions about whether peace can be pursued through military might.

This volume examines the BoP from perspectives across Washington and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. The aim is to assess whether Trump's initiative offers a genuine pathway to reconstruction or primarily serves as a geopolitical realignment that marginalises Palestinians. Contributors to this special report analyse how the BoP intersects with their respective national interests and foreign policy strategies, revealing the calculations behind participation, or otherwise refusal, and the domestic pressures

shaping each state's position. Trump had promised, as he campaigned for a second term around late-2022, to end wars; he has also on various occasions openly expressed his desire for a Nobel Peace Prize. The Board of Peace may yet represent an erosion of those stated ambitions rather than their fulfilment.

Clemens Chay opens the volume with an assessment of the Board's foundational contradictions, examining whether money and military muscle can forge peace where diplomacy has failed. Trump's initiative monetises reconstruction through US$1-billion membership fees while operating outside UN frameworks, yet faces hurdles, including a critical cash crunch and Hamas's refusal to disarm. Most strikingly, the BoP was launched amidst Operation Epic Fury against Iran, exposing the hollowness of American coercion as Russia, Iran, and Gaza resist.

Xavier Guignard begins the analysis of GCC states' approaches by examining Saudi Arabia's defensive positioning in joining the Board despite institutional reservations. Riyadh's participation reflects strategic calculation: avoiding marginalisation while preserving access to Washington. This chapter reveals Saudi discomfort with a framework that sidelines Palestinian agency, concentrates power in Trump's hands, and fails to prevent the Iran war. For Saudi Arabia, the Board represents hedging against an initiative unlikely to outlast the current US administration.

In the third chapter, *Sumaiya Al-Wahaibi* analyses Oman's decision to remain an observer as a reaffirmation of its "positive neutrality", which rejects prioritising reconstruction over Palestinian statehood. The subsequent Iran war validated Oman's caution, positioning Muscat as a viable interlocutor regardless of conflict outcomes—because it never staked credibility on US stewardship.

Saoud Al-Eshaq then traces Qatar's shift from independent mediator to risk-sharing participant following Israel's 2025 missile attack on Doha. Qatar's selective commitment—financial contributions without troop deployments—reduces exposure while maintaining relevance and positioning the country for post-Trump administrations, while recognising that meaningful progress requires US leverage over Israel.

Mahdi Ghuloom, in his essay, explores Bahrain's enthusiastic embrace, driven by King Hamad's coexistence values and desire to institutionalise US ties beyond the controversial Abraham Accords. The Board's diverse membership allows marketing participation as multilateral engagement to Bahrain's anti-normalisation public, though economic austerity constrains contributions.

Hamdah Al Kindi rounds off the Gulf-wide analysis by examining UAE participation through Abu Dhabi's "connectivity agenda" pursuing sustainable stability. The Board extends the logic of the Abraham Accords, yet raises critical questions: whether the UAE's peace perception shifts as Israel, an Accords partner, wages regional war, including against Iran; and how Abu Dhabi reconciles tolerance promotion with its normalisation partner's operations.

Ghaith al-Omari brings the volume full circle with Washington's perspective, demonstrating how ambitious global mandates collided with lost momentum and Iran war distraction. The inaugural meeting revealed neither unified disarmament positions nor sustained US attention. Unless the BoP produces visible progress, it will struggle to demonstrate credibility and fulfil its original mission.

Together, these contributions illuminate the Peace Board's contradictions: monetising reconstruction, pursuing peace amidst war against Iran, and raising hopes for Palestinian futures even as structural challenges—particularly excluded Palestinian voices—persistently undermine them.

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1

The Peace Board: Can Money and Muscle Forge Peace?

Clemens Chay

The inaugural meeting of the Board of Peace (BoP) on 19 February 2026 was quintessentially Trump: heavy on the headlines and light on the details. The launch unveiled "more than US$7 billion" in pledged funding for a Gaza "relief package" from nine countries: Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Morocco, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, and Kuwait.[1] The World Bank, according to its president Ajay Banga, will serve as a "limited trustee" to manage donor contributions under the BoP's direction.[2]

A peacekeeping component has also materialised after months of ambiguity over its mandate fuelled widespread reluctance.[3] At the launch, Indonesia, Morocco, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, and Albania announced troop commitments to the International Stabilization Force (ISF), supplementing ongoing Egyptian and Jordanian efforts to train Palestinian police personnel.

The BoP follows the 20-point peace plan unveiled in September 2025 and adopted two months later under UN Security Council Resolution 2803.[4] In January, at Davos, President Donald Trump announced the Peace Board's founding members while boasting that his administration had "settled eight wars" with another "coming pretty soon"—a reference to Gaza advancing from the fragile ceasefire of Phase One towards the demilitarisation, governance, and reconstruction of Phase Two.[5]

Yet, despite the lofty claims and spectacle of the BoP's first meeting, it faces not only tremendous obstacles to achieving peace in Gaza and beyond. It also conveys a more troubling message that the American vision for the global order now rests on money and muscle alone.

How Strong Is the Monetised Mandate?

For all the superlatives that Trump deployed to describe the BoP—"most consequential," "most prestigious"—questions linger over its financial and political backing.[6] Of over 60 invitations issued, 28 countries have joined at the time of writing this article, indicating tepid global support. What stands out is the rejection by key American allies—France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (UK)—while others like Japan and Australia prefer to keep their distance.[7] These countries may not be joining the Board, but have agreed to participate in a different role. Japan, for example, did not formally sign, but has agreed to contribute to peacekeepers to the ISF. Trump's warning to nations not to "play cute" reveals as much: countries are willing to defy him, and coercion has become necessary precisely because persuasion is failing.[8]

As for financial contributions, President Trump—the BoP's chairman—has demanded US$1 billion in membership fees from countries seeking permanent seats, effectively monetising Gaza's reconstruction. This vision was on full display at the World Economic Forum in Davos when Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, presented renderings of the Strip's coast filled with skyscrapers.[9] By April 2026, this vision had moved beyond presentation: the BoP held discussions with DP World, the UAE-based state logistics giant, about privatising Gaza's infrastructure through new ports and free-trade zones.[10] Yet the BoP's charter makes no reference to Gaza itself, nor to the United Nations (UN)—though Trump ironically announced that the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is raising US$2 billion in support for Gaza.[11]

The silver lining may be that the BoP's launch has spurred separate fundraising efforts: Japan will lead an initiative with participation from South Korea, the Philippines, and Singapore, according to Trump.[12] Still, the US$7 billion pledged by the BoP's 20+ member states remains woefully inadequate. A joint European Union (EU), UN, and World Bank assessment now places Gaza's total recovery and reconstruction needs at US$71.4 billion over 10 years, with US$23 billion needed in the next 18 months alone.[13]

Even Trump's promise of an additional US$10 billion from Washington remains uncertain without Congressional approval—and faces further doubt following the Supreme Court's recent rejection of his global tariffs. The funding situation became more contentious in March when the State Department reportedly reallocated US$1.25 billion from disaster relief and peacekeeping budgets to the Peace Board without Congressional approval, prompting Senate Democrats to introduce legislation blocking the transfer.[14]

Gaza's Sticking Points

Beyond funding uncertainties, the BoP confronts formidable obstacles in Gaza itself. Three unresolved issues threaten any prospect of sustainable peace. First, Hamas has not been disarmed. When the ceasefire began, the group deployed fighters and police throughout Gaza to consolidate control,[15] resulting in rival armed factions—some of them Israeli-backed—competing for dominance.[16] Despite Trump's prediction that

Hamas would surrender its arsenal, no progress has been made. The absence of any disarmament this far into the truce signals trouble ahead.

Second, Israeli forces were supposed to make a temporary pullback to what is known as the "yellow line", reducing their control from over 80 percent to roughly half of Gaza's territory.[17] Yet, they now control approximately 58 percent, indicating continued territorial encroachment beyond the agreed line.[18] Israel's top general has called this demarcation a "new border," while evidence suggests that Israeli troops have shifted boundary markers further westward into areas meant for Palestinian control.[19] Worse, Israel approved measures in February resuming land registration in the West Bank and nullifying restrictions on non-Palestinian land purchases—moves that Israeli officials acknowledge amount to "de facto sovereignty" blocking any Palestinian state.[20]

Third, and compounding the above challenges, is the limited role granted to Palestinians themselves. The National Committee for the Administration of Gaza comprises 15 technocrats led by former Palestinian Authority official Ali Shaath, tasked with restoring essential services—electricity, water, healthcare, and education—alongside stabilising public administration.[21] Questions of political authority, security arrangements, and long-term governance fall outside their purview entirely. The committee answers to the Board of Peace, not to Gazans, leaving reconstruction in external hands. As for the ISF, although troop commitments have materialised, participating countries remain wary of mission creep—concerned that they may be pressured to disarm Hamas beyond traditional peacekeeping.

Is the Board Really About Peace?

Ultimately, the Board of Peace is not about "peace" as traditionally understood—it is about what Trump calls "peace through strength," which amounts to coercion through military might. On 28 February, Trump launched Operation Epic Fury against Iran—combat operations that included strikes on military sites, the assassination of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, and an ongoing war that has disrupted global trade through Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz and retaliatory strikes across the Middle East.

This followed Trump's deployment of what he calls a naval "armada" to the Middle East—two aircraft carriers and 14 surface warships, the largest American presence in the region since the 2003 invasion of Iraq—which he referenced during the BoP's inaugural meeting to reinforce that his approach prioritises muscle over diplomacy.[22] This pattern extends beyond the Middle East: since September, American military strikes on alleged drug boats in the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean have killed more than 181 people.[23] UN officials have condemned such operations as "extrajudicial executions,"[24] although Trump prefers to focus on national security and the toppling of Venezuela's leader, Nicolás Maduro.

Yet the board's foundational logic—that money and muscle alone can forge peace—has already proven hollow. Russia has yet to yield to any peace deal despite extensive pressure. Iran continues to project defiance in its retaliation throughout Operation Epic Fury, closing the Strait of Hormuz and launching strikes across the Middle East rather than capitulating to American force. And Gaza, the BoP's supposed showcase, remains mired in violence and deadlock. The BoP's constraints compound these failures. Secretary of State Marco Rubio insists that Gaza is "impossible to solve under orthodoxy,"[25] yet the structural imbalances —most glaringly, Palestinian underrepresentation relative to Israeli influence, alongside the threat of renewed violence between Israeli strikes and Hamas defiance—threaten to derail the very peace process that the BoP claims to advance.

The Board's first formal report in May 2026 blamed Hamas for stalled implementation, citing refusal to disarm as "the principal obstacle."[26] While the High Representative for Gaza, Nickolay Mladenov, acknowledged violations occur and cause civilian deaths, his Security Council briefing[27] conspicuously avoided addressing Israeli territorial violations—including encroachment beyond the yellow line that has expanded Israel's control well past agreed boundaries.

Whether the Peace Board actually aims to supplant the UN remains debatable, but its trajectory poses dangers regardless. By marginalising established multilateral institutions, the BoP risks normalising a 'might is right' approach to international disputes while destabilising regions where the UN's presence, however imperfect, provides crucial coordination. The irony is sharp: by sidelining the UN, Trump risks creating the very overextension he campaigned against, as allies prove unwilling to support American-led initiatives that lack in international legitimacy.

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Saudi Arabia: A Choice of Influence Under Regional Pressure

Xavier Guignard

Saudi Arabia has maintained a consistent stance on the Palestinian issue since at least the 1980s. From the Fahd Peace Initiative (1981) to the Arab Peace Initiative endorsed by the Arab League (2002), the kingdom has consistently emphasised that implementing a two-state solution is essential for Israel's peaceful integration into the region and that the Palestinians' right to self-determination is non-negotiable. Debates concerning potential Saudi-Israeli normalisation following the Abraham Accords, along with the reduced prominence of the Palestinian issue among Saudi younger generations, have led some observers to argue that Saudi Arabia's position has fundamentally shifted. Nevertheless, Riyadh continues to pursue the same diplomatic agenda, positioning itself as an alternative to both normalisation without the establishment of a Palestinian state and the "Axis of Resistance" project, which opposes the existence of the State of Israel.

On 21 January 2026, in Davos, Prince Faisal bin Farhan signed the Board of Peace (BoP) charter for the Kingdom alongside seven other Arab or Muslim countries. This collective announcement signals that Saudi participation is part of a group effort, and not an individual initiative, guaranteeing that BoP membership does not become a tool of regional competition. The joint statement underscores the signatory countries' pledge to "consolidating a permanent ceasefire, supporting the reconstruction of Gaza, and advancing a just and lasting peace grounded in the Palestinian right to self-determination and statehood," while stressing Saudi Arabia's hope for a limited scope of the BoP's mandate: " (…) supporting the implementation of the mission of the Board of Peace as a transitional administration, as set out in the Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict and endorsed by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2803."[1] This deliberately consensual wording, however, masks more complex calculations.

Established following diplomatic efforts related to the post-Gaza war,[a] the BoP is the current United States (US) administration's response to more ambitious proposals, including the Franco-Saudi proposal for a two-state solution, as stated in the New York Declaration on 29 July 2025.[2] This multilateral framework aligns more closely with the traditional Saudi approach than participation in mechanisms such as the BoP. The New York Declaration, on the other hand, aimed to advance the two-state solution through United Nations mechanisms (the statement refers in particular to "relevant UN resolutions—such as UNSC 242 or GA 19"—and the role of UNRWA) grounded in international law, while the BoP has faced early scrutiny over its governance and its relationship with established multilateral frameworks. The BoP challenges the New York initiative by creating institutional mechanisms associated with Donald Trump, structured as a consortium of states that require membership fees of US$1 billion and grant limited control over its decisions.

In this context, the key question is why Riyadh has chosen to engage in an uncertain framework led by a controversial US initiative and whose membership includes some of Saudi Arabia's regional competitors. Rather than signalling a principled commitment, this decision reflects a strategy to preserve Saudi influence as the regional order evolves. Saudi Arabia's involvement in the BoP is less about alignment and more about positioning Riyadh as a regional pivot amidst rising intra-Gulf rivalries, tensions with Iran, and significant national security threats.

Staying at the Centre of the Diplomatic Game

Saudi Arabia's membership in the BoP is primarily a positioning strategy intended to avoid being sidelined in the shaping of the post-Gaza landscape. With reconstruction, security, and governance of the Occupied Palestinian territories unresolved, Riyadh cannot allow other actors, especially Israel, the US, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, and Türkiye, to set the agenda on their own. Participation, even within an imperfect framework, enables Riyadh to influence the crisis-resolution process from the outset. Riyadh also anticipates that Gaza's reconstruction will require renewed engagement with the Palestinian Authority, which it hopes will govern Gaza and advance a viable institutional framework for Palestinian statehood.

This decision also aims to maintain privileged access to Washington. The BoP, led by the US administration, provides a direct channel for political coordination. By participating, Saudi Arabia resumes its hedging strategy: cooperating with the US on key issues without fully aligning with its positions, especially given the limited progress on the Palestinian issue. This arrangement offers an alternative to formal normalisation with Israel, which would be politically costly at present. Rising tensions with the UAE following the Yemen crisis and disputes over the Horn of Africa triggered a smear campaign in Washington against Saudi Arabia.[3] Riyadh saw its participation in the BoP as a strategic move to mitigate further reputational risk in the US capital. The involvement of multiple Gulf and Middle Eastern powers raises

a These efforts include the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution and the League of Arab States' Gaza Reconstruction Plan.

the political cost of abstention. In the context of increasing rivalry, absence would mean losing diplomatic influence.

Beyond tactical considerations, Saudi Arabia's engagement reflects a broader ambition for leadership, aiming to ensure a stable state-based regional order. With support from China, Iran and Saudi Arabia began to improve their relations in 2023, initiating a process of rapprochement that persisted until the Iranian attacks on Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries in March and April 2026. After the fall of Bashar al-Assad, Saudi Arabia adopted a policy of supporting the new government in Damascus, described as having "no ceiling," according to Saudi Investment Minister Khalid al-Falih.[4] This support encompasses economic measures (approximately 60 billion riyals in investment), diplomatic efforts—evidenced by the initial success in lifting US sanctions during President Donald Trump's visit to Riyadh in May 2025—and security cooperation with Türkiye.[5] Participation in the BoP, along with significant financial commitments, support the Saudi ambition for its heavyweight position in the region and seek to reinforce the Kingdom's image as both stabilising and indispensable.

Managing Unpredictability

Saudi Arabia's inclusion in the BoP theoretically provides tangible leverage over the post-Gaza situation. Participation allows Riyadh to influence reconstruction priorities, financing mechanisms, and security arrangements essential for stabilising the territory. This involvement also strengthens its image as a responsible power contributing to regional crisis management, beyond financial support.

However, these potential gains are accompanied by certain political ambiguities. The BoP gives limited attention to the political aspects of the Palestinian issue, particularly sovereignty and statehood. For Riyadh, which links normalisation with Israel to substantial progress on these points, there is a risk of appearing to support a technocratic approach to reconstruction without a credible political solution. This exposes the Kingdom to criticism from its own public opinion and regional partners. Furthermore, structural limitations undermine the Peace Board's credibility. Governance remains unclear, with concentrated decision-making and limited transparency into funding. There is a large gap between pledged funds and Gaza's needs. The project's viability also depends on uncertain political conditions, particularly the consolidation of the ceasefire and the unresolved role of Hamas, both of which are largely beyond the BoP's control.

Documents from the presentation in Davos and the BoP's inaugural meeting mention only Gaza.[6] However, The BoP charter defines its mission as follows: "The Board of Peace is an international organization that seeks to promote stability, restore dependable and lawful governance, and secure enduring peace in areas affected or threatened by conflict."

Saudi Arabia's onboarding comes at a time when threats to its national security are mounting, particularly in Yemen and the Horn of Africa, and its interest in preserving or restoring stability is rising. Since December 2025, Riyadh has been viewing the worsening security in its immediate regional environment as a systemic threat. The Southern Transitional Council's large-scale campaign in the Yemeni governorates of

Hadhramaut and al-Mahrah threatens the fragile balance supported by Riyadh and undermines border security. Additionally, political shifts in Sudan, tensions in Ethiopia, and rivalries over Eritrean ports amount to destabilisation across the Red Sea coast and the Horn of Africa.

The situation drives port militarisation, empowers non-state actors, and invites interference from rival powers like Israel. These crises threaten regional maritime security—an aspect critical to Saudi Arabia's economy—and turn the Red Sea into an arena of competition and complex risks. Despite Saudi Arabia's security concerns, the BoP has yet to provide effective solutions or prevent the escalation of these specific crises. The recent outbreak of war in Iran by Israel and the US occurred without the consultation of regional allies or BoP participants, leaving them to face the consequences.

Reimagining the BoP Amidst Regional Transformations

While Saudi Arabia initially joined the BoP to influence the post-Gaza situation, ongoing regional realignments have changed its significance. Growing intra-Gulf rivalries, particularly with the UAE, could turn the BoP into a platform for indirect competition. Once closely aligned, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi now differ on economic, security, and diplomatic priorities. Participation in the Peace Board would allow Riyadh to prevent the Emirates from gaining exclusive political benefits on the Palestinian issue.

Simultaneously, Iran's intensifying operations towards the GCC countries in response to the military campaign initiated by Israel and the US are altering Saudi Arabia's strategic priorities. Military threats, risks to energy infrastructure, and the potential for wider conflict have placed national security at the forefront. From the Saudi perspective, the BoP should facilitate deeper engagement with Washington and enable more effective coordination with other actors to prove itself useful.

Originally intended to support Gaza's stabilisation, the BoP could now become a broader platform for regional crisis management. However, this reconfiguration presents a paradox: while the BoP's political value to Riyadh increases, its operational credibility declines. The war in Iran has diverted resources and attention from Gaza, while expanding conflict and security threats throughout the region. If the BoP neither meets its primary objective of managing the post-Gaza crisis nor helps to prevent further regional escalation, it risks being perceived as little more than a coercive platform for US allies rather than a credible space for promoting peace.

Conclusion

Saudi Arabia's involvement in the BoP is primarily a strategic calculation. It is less about supporting a Pax Americana and more about securing a central role in shaping the post-Gaza era and the regional order. By joining with other regional powers, Riyadh aims to preserve its influence, maintain access to Washington, and manage competition.

However, this strategy is unfolding within an uncertain framework. The BoP's political ambiguities, institutional weaknesses, and lack of guarantees for a lasting Palestinian solution limit its effectiveness. The rapidly changing regional environment is also shifting Saudi priorities. The BoP now serves more as a tool for strategic adaptation than stabilisation, and its relevance may not extend beyond the current US administration. This poses a risk for Riyadh, as it may have undermined regional or international multilateralism to accommodate the ambitions of an unpredictable American partner. Ultimately, by joining the BoP, Riyadh is not committing to a specific peace initiative. Instead, its participation equates to exercising a confluence of normative, discursive, and reputational powers to avoid marginalisation.

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3

Oman: Positive Neutrality and the Limits of U.S.-Led Peace

Sumaiya Al-Wahaibi

On 19 February 2026, Oman's Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al-Busaidi attended the first Board of Peace (BoP) meeting, but strictly as an observer. The official statement framed participation as consistent with Oman's "fixed approach" to dialogue, respect for international law, and United Nations (UN) resolutions supporting a two-state solution with East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital.[1] Rather than praising the institutional design of the BoP, the statement anchored engagement in normative principles. By sending the foreign minister to the meeting while avoiding membership, Muscat signalled constructive engagement without institutional alignment.

Political scientist, Omran Al-Abri, characterises this posture as "observation without commitment", maintaining awareness and presence while avoiding binding obligations.[2] This observer posture builds on Oman's earlier reaction to the Gaza ceasefire initiative. In January 2026, the Foreign Ministry welcomed international efforts tied to UN Security Council Resolution 2803[3] while stressing the need for a clear roadmap toward Palestinian statehood.[4] The emphasis on timelines reflects a core Omani concern that reconstruction cannot replace a political settlement.

The inaugural BoP meeting introduced a framework combining reconstruction funding with the prospect of an international stabilisation force. Yet, uncertainty surrounding governance structures, financial oversight, and the political horizon for Gaza persists. From an Omani perspective, these ambiguities raise questions about institutional durability. Muscat's diplomatic tradition privileges multilateral legitimacy over initiatives closely associated with individual leaders or shifting geopolitical alignments. The proposed stabilisation force deepens these concerns. While some states frame the mission as humanitarian, the presence of external command structures blurs

the boundary between reconstruction and political leverage. Oman historically favours mediation and confidence-building roles rather than externally imposed security arrangements.

Decoding the Logic of Positive Neutrality

Rather than issuing explicit criticism, Muscat relies on layered signalling: official statements, media framing, and elite discourse that link institutional concerns to foreign-policy doctrine. Oman's observer participation reflects what its policymakers and analysts often describe as "positive neutrality": a doctrine that, as Al-Abri notes, has functioned as an institutionalised methodology in Omani foreign policy since at least the mid-1980s.[5] This posture is communicated through three mutually reinforcing layers of signalling. At the official level, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs framed participation within a consistent normative framework centred on international law, self-determination, and UN legitimacy. The language avoids endorsing the BoP's institutional framework; instead, it presents engagement as part of Oman's broader diplomatic ethos.

Semi-official media narratives[a] echo this stance. Coverage in the *Oman Daily*, for example, adopted a neutral, wire-style format that relayed announcements without celebratory framing. The coverage juxtaposed funding pledges and military planning with references to Palestinian fears of exclusion, continued Israeli strikes, and UN humanitarian warnings. Rather than elevating individual political leadership, the framing redirected attention toward legitimacy and humanitarian realities, signalling cautious observation rather than endorsement.

A third layer emerges through elite diplomatic commentary. Reflecting on Oman's observer status, Omani academics and diplomats, earlier cited in this article, framed the move as consistent with a doctrine of 'positive neutrality', emphasising the continuity of messaging, independence of decision-making, and openness to all parties. Drawing parallels with Switzerland's and Austria's observer postures, these commentaries present participation not as hesitation but as a strategic investment in diplomatic capital.[6] This positioning enables Oman to maintain access without assuming alignment. Together, these layers reveal a coherent communication strategy: institutional caution is translated into discursive restraint, reinforcing Muscat's cultivated role as an 'interlocutor state': a country that develops a reputation for trustworthiness to become a trusted go-between, thus securing a more independent niche in an otherwise contested regional system.

Regional Calculus and Perception Risk

More strategically, Oman's observer posture reflects disagreement not only with the BoP's ambiguities but with its sequencing. Public descriptions of the initiative place reconstruction funding, governance transition, and an international stabilisation force

a In the context of Gulf media, "semi-official" describes outlets that are not direct state organs but operate within a framework of state ownership, state subsidy, or sufficiently close editorial alignment with official positions that their coverage reliably reflects or amplifies government messaging without being formally instructed to do so.

at the centre of the immediate postwar agenda, while leaving the political horizon contingent on later developments. Muscat's own language has pointed in the opposite direction.

In welcoming the initiative tied to UN Security Council Resolution 2803, the Foreign Ministry simultaneously insisted on a clear roadmap and defined timeline towards the two-state solution. What Oman rejects is sequencing reconstruction and stabilisation before securing a credible political horizon for Palestinian self-determination. Financial pledges at the inaugural meeting reinforced concerns that reconstruction without political settlement risks becoming managerial rather than transformative. The scale of that gap has since become concrete: the BoP has received virtually none of the US$17 billion pledged by its members, of an estimated US$70 billion required, and Arab governments remain unwilling to contribute while a credible path to Palestinian statehood is absent, confirming that the shortfall is not incidental but structural.[7]

Oman's positioning also reflects a quieter regional calculus. Muscat traditionally coordinates with the Arab League and OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) consensus on Palestine. Several non-Abraham Accords states—Algeria, Tunisia, and Iraq—have similarly refrained from full membership. By maintaining observer status, Oman preserves proximity to this camp while continuing constructive engagement with Washington's initiative. This balancing allows Muscat to remain regionally credible among states wary of rapid normalisation dynamics, while avoiding isolation from emerging diplomatic frameworks. Regional dynamics reinforce this caution.

As regional analysts note, Oman has sought to maintain an independent diplomatic trajectory amidst shifting GCC alignments and growing unease over deeper Israel-UAE (United Arab Emirates) security cooperation.[8] Al-Abri makes the perception risk explicit: full membership in a body widely perceived in the region as closely aligned with the strategic priorities of the United States (US) and Israel would erode Oman's credibility as a state that simultaneously sustains diplomatic and security relationships with Gulf states, Iran, Israel, the Palestinians, and the US.[9] Historical memory, including of the Dhofar war and earlier periods of external interference,[b] informs Muscat's sensitivity to initiatives that could reshape regional security frameworks.

Palestinian Commitments and Domestic Resonance

Beyond the general logic of positive neutrality, Oman's observer posture reflects a set of specifically Palestinian policy commitments that the BoP's institutional design directly challenges. Muscat has consistently conditioned engagement

b The Dhofar war (1965–1976) was a counterinsurgency conflict in Oman's southern province, in which the Sultan's Armed Forces, backed by Britain, Jordan, and Iran, defeated a Soviet-supported Marxist insurgency. Though ultimately successful, the conflict exposed Muscat to the dangers of becoming an arena for competing external powers. Combined with earlier nineteenth and 20th-century episodes in which foreign actors exploited Oman's internal divisions, these experiences consolidated a strategic culture deeply wary of externally designed security arrangements and protective of Omani agency in regional affairs.

with Israeli-linked frameworks on measurable progress towards negotiated settlement. When the Netanyahu government accelerated settlement expansion in 1996, Oman suspended its trade representation with Israel, signalling that access remained contingent rather than unconditional.[10]

While Abraham Accords partners deepened security and weapons-trade ties with Israel, absorbing nearly a quarter of its record 2022 defence exports,[11] Oman held firm: comprehensive peace is inseparable from Palestinian self-determination, with full statehood and East Jerusalem as its capital as the non-negotiable threshold. This is not diplomatic temperament but a longstanding and specifically Palestinian condition, one that places the terms of resolution firmly with Israel, and makes Oman's constraint publicly legible rather than merely implied.[12,13]

The Palestinian issue remains the deepest layer shaping Oman's positioning. Official statements consistently foreground self-determination, international law, and the two-state solution. Yet, Oman's stance is not driven solely by diplomatic calculus; it is also rooted in societal dynamics. Public solidarity has intensified since October 2023, with youth activism playing a visible role. A generation shaped by the Second Intifada[c] demonstrates heightened awareness, framing Palestine as a central moral cause through expanded donations, campaigns, and gatherings near the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque. Meanwhile the Grand Mufti's repeated public interventions, including explicit endorsement of the Majlis al-Shura boycott proposal, illustrate how religious authority amplifies and legitimises that pressure on official positioning.[14]

Institutional initiatives further illustrate this societal dimension. In February 2026, the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs launched the Palestine Endowment Institution, which is designed to channel charitable contributions through a governance-based framework that supports Palestinians.[15] The initiative reflects how state institutions translate public sentiment into structured humanitarian engagement. At the same time, historical complexity remains.

While many younger Omanis are less aware of earlier periods of pragmatic engagement with Israel in the 1990s or Sultan Qaboos's cautious relations with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) amidst the Dhofar conflict, these memories continue to shape elite strategic thinking. The coexistence of strong public solidarity with cautious diplomatic positioning underscores the balancing act at the heart of Oman's foreign policy. This domestic resonance helps explain why Oman's room for manoeuvre on Palestine is narrower than on other regional files. Alignment with a framework perceived to dilute Palestinian agency would not only affect external credibility, but also sit uneasily with a deeply embedded moral consensus at home.

c The Second Intifada (2000–2005) was a Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation, triggered by Ariel Sharon's visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in September 2000. Marked by sustained armed confrontations, suicide bombings, and large-scale Israeli military operations in the West Bank and Gaza, it resulted in the deaths of approximately 3,000 Palestinians and 1,000 Israelis and generated intense pan-Arab solidarity across the region.

The War and the Limits of the Peace Board

That sensitivity has been sharpened by the most significant regional rupture since the BoP's founding meeting. The escalation of hostilities between the US and Iran following the collapse of nuclear talks in late February 2026 has materially altered the regional environment in which the BoP must operate and has lent Oman's observer posture a retroactive coherence it might not otherwise have possessed. Gulf states that had anchored their economic futures in stability, through tourism, aviation, technology investment, and data infrastructure, now find that strategic proximity to American security arrangements carries acute vulnerability rather than guaranteed protection. The disruption of maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz has compounded these risks, threatening energy supply chains and economic planning across the region.

From this vantage point, Oman's refusal to bind itself institutionally to a US-led peace framework appears less like hesitation than foresight. A state that had already committed to full membership in the BoP would now find itself entangled with a belligerent power whose regional credibility is in question. Indonesia's trajectory makes the contrast concrete. Jakarta committed 1,000 troops to Gaza's stabilisation force, then froze all BoP discussions in early March 2026 following US-Iran escalation. President Prabowo Subianto indicated he would withdraw if the Peace Board ceased to serve Palestinian interests.[16] The Indonesian case precisely illustrates the institutional entanglement that Oman's observer posture was designed to avoid.

Foreign Minister Al-Busaidi's March 2026 assessment in *The Economist* was unusually candid: America had "lost control of its own foreign policy," a judgement carrying weight from the official who mediated recent US-Iran nuclear talks.[17] Whether this represents coordinated policy or personal intervention in crisis remains unclear. Time will clarify if this candour reflects a durable recalibration of Oman's diplomatic voice.

For the BoP, the implications are significant. A reconstruction framework premised on American leadership cannot be insulated from the political consequences of that leadership's conduct elsewhere in the region. Oman's posture of presence without institutional commitment positions Muscat to remain a viable interlocutor regardless of how the conflict resolves—precisely because it never staked credibility on American stewardship. The war raises a prior question about the BoP's adequacy: whether Gaza-centred reconstruction can carry weight while wider regional conflict remains unresolved.

Al-Busaidi's writing implies an answer.[18] He argues that durable peace requires bilateral reconciliation between Washington and Tehran, serving both parties' national interests and not externally imposed stabilisation. He proposes multilateral nuclear transparency as a confidence-building path. From this vantage point, Oman's conception of peace is architecturally more ambitious than the BoP's mandate: reconstruction without regional de-escalation is not a peace process but a holding pattern.

Conclusion

Oman's observer participation reaffirms its diplomatic doctrine of engagement without endorsement, and involvement without sacrificing neutrality and multilateral legitimacy. Through layered signalling, official statements, media framing, and elite diplomatic discourse, the Sultanate communicates a clear strategic message that influence does not require alignment. That judgement has since found later external corroboration, as Russia's Foreign Ministry publicly questioned whether the BoP could coexist with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as the only universally recognised body for maintaining international peace and security.[19] It is a concern that reinforces the multilateral-legitimacy logic underpinning Oman's choice of observer status from the outset.

The Peace Board's design, founded outside the UN framework, premised on donor-led reconstruction, and conditioned on external stabilisation ahead of political settlement, runs directly counter to the normative architecture that Muscat has consistently upheld—one that is grounded in international law, UN Resolutions, and the primacy of Palestinian self-determination. In a region defined by fluid alliances and experimental security, Oman's posture exemplifies a distinct form of small-state statecraft, one that balances pragmatism with principle. By remaining at the table without binding itself to the structure, Muscat preserves the autonomy necessary to defend its ordering of peace-making, where Palestinian agency, legal legitimacy, and political horizon precede reconstruction rather than follow from it.

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4

Qatar's Board Calculus: From Independent Mediator to Risk-Sharing Participant

Saoud Al-Eshaq

Qatar's involvement in the Board of Peace appears to be part of a recalibration of its foreign policy toward the Gaza file. The recalibration is aimed at reducing the political exposure that accompanied its previously more independent stance, while still maintaining a stake in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Since the 1990s, the Gaza file has constituted an important arena through which Qatar's foreign policy has been exercised, enabling it to generate political capital, project international influence on various audiences—including states that have historically played a role in this politically sensitive file such as the United States (US) and the 'Arab World'—and serve as an important dimension of Qatar–US ties.

The aftermath of the 7 October 2023 Hamas attacks on Israel heightened political and security risks for Qatar's mediation strategy, including intensified efforts by Israeli and American officials to undermine Qatar's role in Gaza and direct security threats against Qatari territory that manifested through a missile attack. While such pressures are not entirely new, their increased scale and intensity are forcing Qatar to adopt a new approach to the Gaza file. Within this context, Qatar's engagement with the Board of Peace represents an adaptation to these evolving constraints. To understand Qatar's rationale behind its decision to enroll and engage with the Board of Peace, a brief history of how Doha has approached the Israel–Palestine file would be useful.

The Evolution of Qatar's Mediation in Gaza

Qatar's mediation strategy has been centred for decades on its role in establishing channels of communication with Israel and Hamas. Following the rise to power of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani in 1995, Qatar increasingly leveraged its foreign policy as a means to project power and carve a niche for itself regionally and in the broader international system.[1] Although engaging in mediation efforts existed well before Qatar declared independence from the British in 1971, it was in the post-1995 political environment that mediation was actively used as a tool to exercise influence, and as part of a deterrent effect. This was achieved by establishing Qatar's indispensability to the international system, with

the Israel–Palestine file being a central area of such diplomatic investment.[2]

An important episode that established Qatar's commitment to the file occurred in 1999, when Qatar agreed to temporarily host the Hamas leadership following a disagreement with Jordan that resulted in their temporary expulsion to Doha. This was followed by Qatar hosting the Hamas political bureau permanently in Doha from 2012 onward.[3] Since then, a number of corollary developments have occurred—including the opening of an Israeli trade office from 1996 to 2009, marking the first time a Gulf state had established such ties with Israel—alongside consistent financial aid to Gaza and other territories.[4] Qatar's approach is rooted in the understanding that as long as Israel and Hamas demonstrate a willingness to negotiate, Qatar will always provide space for such interactions to occur.[5]

After the Hamas-led attack on 7 October 2023, Qatar has been heavily involved, and often in a leading role, in mediating the conflict. In November 2023, Qatar, alongside Egypt, became a key mediator in successfully establishing a temporary ceasefire that led to the largest release of living Israeli hostages since the beginning of the 7 October conflict, as well as the provision of much-needed humanitarian aid to Gaza.[6]

Challenges of Mediation

Following this temporary ceasefire, Qatar's involvement in the Gaza file was increasingly fraught with challenges that pushed its foreign policy to its extremes and effectively questioned the sustainability of its approach. In April 2024, Qatar's foreign minister announced that Doha was re-evaluating its role as a mediator following a barrage of attacks by various actors—including members of the US Congress—that sought to undermine and mischaracterise Qatar's mediatory role.[7]

This was also followed by a physical attack on 9 September 2025, when the Israeli Air Force launched Operation Summit of Fire that resulted in ten missiles targeting a residential compound in Doha that was hosting Hamas negotiators.[8] In response, Qatar immediately scaled back its mediating efforts, with fewer clandestine meetings in Doha, while a growing Egyptian and Turkish role was observed.

The Israeli attack on Doha was followed by an intensification in mediatory efforts under the leadership of the US, culminating in President Donald Trump announcing the 20-point peace proposal for Gaza that envisioned the establishment of a Board of Peace.[9] In November 2025, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 2803 that endorsed the Board of Peace. The charter was formally ratified almost two months later in Davos, with Qatar as a signatory.[10,11,12]

That Qatar was an early signatory is in line with its realisation that continuing its mediatory approach in the existing form would be futile. Qatar had already been attacked by Israel—one of the parties it was actively working with in the mediation process. Given the continued deterioration of the situation in Gaza, the previous mediation model offered Qatar diminishing strategic value, while increasing its exposure to

risks that it was not willing to absorb. Qatar's involvement within the Board of Peace can therefore be interpreted as a response to these constraints.

Qatar's Approach to the Board of Peace

Regardless of whether Qatari officials view the more ambitious reconstruction proposal embedded within the Board of Peace as attainable or not, this initiative is the only option currently on the table. Qatar is adopting a risk-averse approach that seeks to share the burden of the Gaza file with regional and international players. In doing so, it has removed a substantial strain on itself, while remaining politically active in the file in the hope that the Board of Peace could muster sufficient support to lead to a positive outcome in Gaza.

Qatar, alongside other states, has witnessed the limitations of the UN in bringing about meaningful change in the conflict. In contrast, with President Trump leading the Board of Peace, there is a perceived possibility that his ability to exert pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu could make the initiative more effective, at least in curtailing further escalations, and not necessarily in bringing about lasting peace and prosperity.

This is critical for Qatar, considering the spillover effects of 7 October—including the risk of a broader confrontation involving the US and Iran, which would have massive implications for regional security. These risks have since materialised as the US and Israel—allegedly on the behest of the latter—launched an intensive military campaign against Iran on 28 February 2026. Before these attacks, Qatar was arguably hit the hardest among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states as it was attacked by both Iran and Israel within a span of a few months—a direct result of the escalations starting from 7 October 2023.

Qatar's Commitments to the Board of Peace

Qatar's engagement with the Board of Peace reflects a strategy of selective commitment, where financial contributions are used to sustain influence while avoiding deeper security entanglements. The prime minister of Qatar announced during the inaugural meeting of the Board of Peace that Qatar would commit US$1 billion, while affirming that Doha would continue providing humanitarian assistance to Gaza through both the UN and the Board of Peace.[13]

Such financial investment is partly influenced by the transactional nature that has characterised the US presidency under Trump. Over the years, Qatar has skillfully leveraged its wealth as part of a broader projection of soft power. Given that Qatar still views the US as a primary security partner, not contributing financially would risk a negative reaction from the US presidency. Yet, unlike previous instances of post-conflict reconstruction in Gaza, Qatar did not 'over-contribute'; its financial commitment, at least on paper, was matched by Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

Qatar appeared to reap the fruits of its approach almost instantaneously when President Trump stated that Qatar has supported the US

on numerous occasions, while also stating that Qatar was not an evil state but an ally.[14] This was particularly important, given the aforementioned slew of negative campaigns aimed at undermining US–Qatari ties.

What Qatar did not do was commit law enforcement and military forces to Gaza as part of the International Stabilization Force (ISF). This was expected, as not only were some Israeli officials highly critical of Qatar's potential involvement in the Board of Peace, to begin with, but also of prospects of Qatari boots on the ground. Following the Israeli attack on Qatar that had resulted in the death of a member of the Qatari Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya), this would have been unpalatable for Qatari officials and the broader domestic population, while also being possibly counterproductive for Israel.[15]

Dealing with a US-Dominated Framework

Looking ahead, Qatar appears to be hunkering down as the Trump presidency unfolds, while positioning itself for the day after the MAGA administration ends. Whether a Republican or Democratic administration takes over, Qatar's approach to the Gaza file—along with further reinforcing its successful mediating efforts elsewhere, such as in Afghanistan—should render it politically relevant to the US, while also securing Qatar's own foreign policy objectives.

At the same time, the ongoing war in the Gulf, following the US and Israeli-led aggression on Iran, has pushed discussions around the Board of Peace into the background. For Qatar, the continuation of the war in Gaza, alongside the war on Iran and its regional implications, has reinforced a longstanding perception that US policy in the region is shaped by Israeli priorities—even when this comes at the expense of Gulf security concerns. Yet, the irony is that Qatar recognises that any meaningful progress on the Gaza file is unlikely to manifest without direct US involvement and its ability to exert influence over Israeli decision-making.

At the current juncture, adopting a foreign policy approach that embraces a multilateral-driven framework gives Qatar the flexibility it needs to continue its involvement in Gaza. Indeed, Qatar's foreign minister had highlighted the potential combined role of the UN and the Board of Peace at the inaugural session of the latter framework. This highlights that Qatar does not view this initiative as an immediate replacement for the established role of the UN. As a small state, Qatar has often leveraged the UN as a force multiplier in the past. Adding the Board of Peace to this layered leverage approach is beneficial, as it further enhances Qatar's force-multiplier effect.

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5

Bahrain's Coexistence Diplomacy: Royal Vision Meets Fiscal Reality

Mahdi Ghuloom

Bahrain has welcomed the Board of Peace (BoP) initiative by United States (US) President Donald Trump with open arms and direct, high-level engagement. Having received a formal invitation to join around mid-January,[1] Bahrain already has royal directives from King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa on how its government can focus on contributing to the BoP's mandate. Some of these have already been implemented, including contributing to a US$7-billion fund for the BoP's operations and administration,[a] and announcing a "readiness to provide the necessary infrastructure and skills to establish an effective Government Digital Services platform for Gaza."[2] Moreover, the Royal Humanitarian Foundation (RHF) announced in the same week as the first BoP meeting, a 100-ton consignment of humanitarian aid sent to Gaza in cooperation with Operation Gallant Knight 3 and the Emirates Red Crescent in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).[3] More details about Bahrain's formulation of a Board of Peace policy will likely get illuminated in the coming months.

Whatever crystallises in the future, some things are clear: first, Bahrain's engagement with the BoP is a strategic projection of a national identity rooted in the principles of coexistence and tolerance, personally championed by the King. Second, it is a mechanism to deepen and institutionalise ties with the United States (US) away from the domestically controversial Abraham Accords[b] and more ingrained with celebrated

a The exact amount of the contribution remains undisclosed at the time of writing.
b A large segment of Bahrain's population has been vocally against normalisation of relations with Israel.

momentum in the Kingdom's foreign policy for multilateral mechanisms (even if Trump-led). Finally, it has to be approached with caution from a financial perspective, given fiscal austerity and the public sensitivities surrounding it.

The Royal Imperative for Showcasing the Nation's Identity

In the early days of Ramadan in February—a season usually prioritised for significant domestic engagement—the King of Bahrain made an exception and travelled to Washington, DC, for the first BoP meeting. Although His Majesty could have delegated a senior official, as most participants did, the importance of the BoP's mandate for Bahrain's identity prompted his direct engagement.

King Hamad has fostered a national identity that is rooted in peace, coexistence, and tolerance. He maintains that these values are at "the heart" of Bahrain's identity, which he reiterated on the sidelines of the BoP meeting.[4] It is also seen as a mandate of the King Hamad Global Center for Coexistence and Tolerance that Bahrain "transfers" its unique "model of coexistence and tolerance to all parts of the world," according to its website.[5] The Center itself sponsors educational programmes with students from across the globe, in addition to awarding grants to individuals and organisations working on promoting such values. It also proposed to the UN General Assembly to adopt 28 January as the annual International Day of Peaceful Coexistence, a day that also marks the birthday of King Hamad.[6]

With such royal initiatives in place and increasingly gaining momentum, it is no surprise that the King personally attended the BoP meeting. As noted by a Middle Eastern diplomat interviewed by the author, "Bahrain is historically unique in the region as a country where Jews and Muslims lived side by side in good neighbourly relations for ages."[7] With a focus on promoting coexistence based on its own lessons and identity, Bahrain could become the patron of value diffusion within the BoP mandate.

It is also notable that the Iranian aggression on the Gulf States, including Bahrain, during the 40-day Iran War, has not shifted His Majesty's vision on the BoP. In a royal address marking the last ten days of Ramadan—while attacks were ensuing from Iran—the King noted that Bahrain will remain "firmly committed" to the spirit of wisdom and moderation, "proceeding with confidence and balance in fulfilling its responsibilities toward its Arab region and the international community," and that the "decision to join the Board of Peace concerned with the reconstruction of Gaza reflects the clarity of our national positions and the alignment of our policies with efforts aimed at promoting peace, supporting reconstruction, and creating the conditions necessary for lasting stability."[8]

Reinforcing the Relationship with the US

While the King had attended the first meeting of the BoP, the preceding signing ceremony for its charter in Davos was attended by His Highness Shaikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, a Minister

of the Prime Minister's Court, and the eldest grandson of the King. Sitting next to President Trump, Shaikh Isa "affirmed the importance of continuing to strengthen the historic bilateral and strategic relationship between Bahrain and the United States,"[9] which reflects a secondary yet notable impetus for the Kingdom to pursue membership on the BoP.

Bahrain has been seeking to build on the Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement (C-SIPA), signed in September 2023. This agreement is one that Bahrain views as slightly short of Article Five[c] of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).[10] It is also one that, with the help of the US, the Kingdom wants to turn into a minilateral framework with other countries joining, as the United Kingdom (UK) did in June 2025.[11]

While the Abraham Accords also earned Bahrain favour with the US, its engagement with the Board of Peace is also driven by the fact that it is growing to become a larger, and less controversial, multilateral achievement. While the Accords likely helped Bahrain gain an invitation to join, it is important to note that the BoP is not restricted to Accords signatories. The inclusion of counterparts such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait means that Bahrain can market its engagement to its large domestic anti-normalisation audience that is estimated to include more than 90 percent of the population.[12] Despite being singlehandedly US-led, its diverse membership is seen as almost no different from a Bahraini foreign policy edging towards multilateral leadership, one that has earned Bahrain a non-permanent seat in the Security Council this year and the next.[13]

Economic Constraints Are a Relevant Concern

The economic reality in Bahrain is an important challenge for the government in getting domestic buy-in for joining the BoP. It was at the beginning of the year when the Kingdom implemented important economic reforms aimed at fiscal consolidation.[14] Only days after the BoP meeting, Fitch downgraded Bahrain's credit rating, adding to the concerns about the economy.[15] For locals, that the Kingdom appears willing to spend on foreign endeavours while tightening the belt at home has been a point of controversy.

It is no surprise therefore that Bahrain has not announced its actual financial contribution to the Peace Board. The Bahraini Minister of Sustainable Development, Noor bint Ali Alkhulaif, spent some time in Davos, also dismissing claims that Bahrain was paying US$1 billion for a permanent seat on the Board.[16] There is talk among the public that even the contribution that Bahrain has ultimately made was sourced from royal funds rather than a government one, despite there being no official statement on the matter.

c Article Five of NATO commits members to mutual defence.

Given this, President Trump's viral quip at the King of Bahrain that the King can "take 25 % of the building [the Donald J. Trump Institute of Peace] for about $6 billion"[17]—may not have been aligned optically. While the Bahraini political machinery might not respond to the president's unique tonality, it would be advisable for the latter to be better aligned with the realities in Bahrain before mentioning riches and making such banter.

Conclusion

Bahrain's participation in the BoP offers the platform a valuable opportunity to internationalise a narrative of coexistence and tolerance which sits at the core of the King's vision for Bahrain's global role and brand. At the same time, the participation reinforces Bahrain's longstanding security and political alignment with the US and a foreign policy driven by multilateralism (whether stemming from the UN or outside its scope).

On the domestic public opinion front, the Peace Board is a slight relief for a public largely sceptical of any normalisation that it is not an Abraham Accords project. Yet, public opinion has also been a limiting factor, as the controversies of economic austerity at home explain why Bahrain's financial contributions remain vague. Ultimately, Bahrain's BoP policy reveals the familiar tension in small-state diplomacy of punching above one's weight internationally amidst modest realities at home.

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6

The UAE: Connectivity, Tolerance, and the Abraham Accords Paradox

Hamdah Al Kindi

The Gaza Strip is facing one of the most complex phases in the Palestine–Israel conflict, as attention has shifted from ending the war to shaping what follows. Experience shows that temporary ceasefires without a lasting political and security framework often only lead to renewed violence. In response, the United States (US)-led Board of Peace proposes managing Gaza's transition through security, reconstruction, and civil governance, with regional and international involvement.[1] This initiative reflects broader changes in crisis management in the Middle East. Within this context, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has emerged as a key potential contributor, raising questions about its role, foreign policy priorities, and alignment with the US.

The UAE's Diplomatic Philosophy: From Crisis Management to Lasting Stability

The UAE's role in the Board of Peace reflects its broader diplomatic strategy of proactive crisis management that aims to address conflicts before they escalate. In recent years, Abu Dhabi has prioritised de-escalation, building bridges of communication and strengthening stability through economic development and humanitarian action. This approach has been reflected in several important moves, most notably the normalisation of relations with Israel within the framework of the Abraham Accords (2020),[2] the opening of diplomatic dialogue channels with Iran, and various social and humanitarian initiatives, particularly in Gaza.

The UAE views the Peace Board not merely as a mechanism for managing the post-war phase, but as an opportunity to reshape the approach toward the Palestine issue. This involves shifting focus from managing recurring crises to building long-term stability through reconstruction, improving humanitarian conditions, and creating a more stable political environment. This outlook aligns with the UAE's 'connectivity agenda', a pillar of its foreign policy based on keeping channels of dialogue open with various regional and international actors and working with them within a cooperative framework that supports mutual development and prosperity.

A Historical Commitment to the Palestinian Cause

Since its establishment in 1971, the UAE has been one of the most prominent supporters of the Palestinian cause and the two-state solution, which it views as the most realistic path to achieving just and sustainable peace in the Middle East.[3] This vision stems from a conviction that temporary truces or de-escalation efforts without genuine political and developmental solutions serve neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis. Instead, they leave the roots of the conflict unresolved and make its recurrence likely.

From the UAE's perspective, peace does not simply mean establishing diplomatic relations or signing political agreements. It also requires creating a serious space for discussion on the fundamental issues that have long remained unresolved, most notably the future of a Palestinian state and the broader question of regional stability. Therefore, the UAE views any opportunity for peace, including initiatives related to Gaza, as a window to bring parties to the negotiating table and initiate responsible discussions on addressing the causes of the conflict. De-escalation in Palestine does not only mean calming a local conflict arena; it represents a crucial step toward reducing tensions across the Middle East as a whole.

The Abraham Accords

In this context, the Abraham Accords emerged as part of a broader Emirati vision aimed at promoting the values of tolerance and coexistence and opening new channels for dialogue in a region long dominated by divisions and conflict.

An important step toward reshaping relations across the region, the Accords are premised on opening dialogue channels and promoting regional integration. However, Israel's continued military operations—in Gaza, Lebanon, and now against Iran—raise critical questions about whether diplomatic and economic normalisation provides the UAE with meaningful leverage over Israeli conduct. Abu Dhabi's diplomatic access has not translated into restraint on Israeli military actions, suggesting that the Accords' utility as a moderating force remains limited. The initiative showed initial promise when then Israel Prime Minister Yair Lapid endorsed "two states for two peoples" in his 2022 UN General Assembly speech, which many attributed to normalisation's moderating influence.[4]Yet the combination of Netanyahu's return to power with a hardline coalition and the events of 7 October 2023 reversed that trajectory. The UAE, nevertheless, appears to calculate that sustained engagement, even without immediate behavioural change, preserves long-term influence that isolation would forfeit.

The Board of Peace: A Diplomatic, Not Military Platform

The UAE's support for the Board of Peace is closely tied to shifts in US policy during the Trump administration, which encourage greater regional involvement in managing Middle East crises. This approach has emphasised partnerships and linking peace to economic cooperation, a strategy clearly reflected in the Abraham Accords. In line with this, the UAE views the Board as an opportunity to reinforce the Emirati approach of transforming challenges into opportunities and replacing instability with stability.

Within this framework, the concept of the Board of Peace aligns with a broader vision that achieving stability in the post-war phase cannot rely solely on traditional international mediation. Rather, it requires active participation from regional states and the international community to support reconstruction and strengthen political and economic stability. Here, the UAE stands out as a partner capable of contributing to these efforts, drawing on its experience in humanitarian action and development initiatives, and its growing diplomatic role in the region.

The UAE seeks to play a diplomatic, developmental, and humanitarian role in the Board rather than a purely security-focused one. Critically, it has made clear it will not contribute military or security forces to Gaza's stabilisation.[5] Abu Dhabi's role centres on diplomatic facilitation, reconstruction funding, and humanitarian support. This represents a shift from its initial conditional support for the International Stabilization Force, which Abu Dhabi tied to a clear mandate built on Hamas' agreement to surrender its weapons. Without such guarantees and corresponding commitments from partner countries, direct security involvement would expose Emirati forces to operational risks while potentially undermining the UAE's positioning as an honest broker. In these circumstances, the UAE prefers its contribution to remain in civilian domains where it has proven expertise.

More broadly, the importance of the Board also lies in the possibility that it could establish a precedent for an organised security role for Arab and Islamic countries in supporting stability in Gaza. Such participation could help build greater trust among the different parties. The involvement of regional states in security, humanitarian, and administrative arrangements could provide practical guarantees that strengthen stability and reduce fears of renewed cycles of violence. In this context, the Board of Peace could become an important component of future arrangements related to the establishment of a Palestinian state, particularly given the security concerns expressed by Israel regarding the possibility that such a state could become a security threat. Through a coordinated regional role that supports stability, such mechanisms could contribute to creating a more balanced environment that helps advance political settlement efforts.

Challenges and Prospects

'Operation Epic Fury' against Iran in late February 2026 has fundamentally altered the regional context in which the Peace Board operates. With Israel—the UAE's Abraham Accords partner—leading military operations that threaten Gulf security through Iranian retaliation, Abu Dhabi faces uncomfortable tensions between

its normalisation commitments and its threat perceptions. The war has disrupted momentum on Gaza reconstruction, diverted attention and resources, and raised questions about whether the UAE's connectivity agenda can withstand regional military escalation. Whether this causes the UAE to recalibrate its approach to peace—prioritising de-escalation over development—remains an open question that the BoP's trajectory will help answer.

The success of the Board of Peace could mark a turning point in the Middle East if it shifts Gaza's post-war phase from crisis management to building lasting stability. By establishing effective governance, advancing reconstruction, and improving humanitarian conditions, it could reduce tensions with Israel and limit repeated escalations. Greater stability may also curb external interference and create space for a more balanced political process. This approach aligns with the UAE's perspective that addressing the root causes of crises, rather than simply containing their consequences, is the most realistic path to achieving lasting peace in the region. If the initiative succeeds, it could help revive the two-state solution and support the creation of a Palestinian state, fostering broader regional stability.

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7

The View from Washington: Between Ambition and Distraction

Ghaith al-Omari

The Board of Peace (BoP) was conceived as a forum for ending the Gaza war and managing the post-conflict reality in the coastal strip. However, it soon became clear that United States (US) President Donald Trump aspires for the BoP to play a more expanded role in addressing conflicts across the globe. This controversial goal has raised serious questions regarding the wisdom and practicality of this approach, and is generating reactions ranging from scepticism to fierce opposition. The Iran conflict has only exacerbated matters.

Even if the US administration were to continue pursuing this ambitious goal, its chances of success are minimal without demonstrating its ability to make progress regarding the conflict for which it was originally created, namely, Gaza. The Peace Board's February 2026 inaugural meeting—whether in terms of attendance or substantive progress—and developments in Gaza do not bode well for its ambitions.

Background

The idea of the BoP can be traced to the Biden Administration (2021-2025) but got its first official public mention when President Trump announced his 20-point plan to end the Gaza war.[1] The Plan envisioned the Board as a "new international transitional body" that "will set the framework and handle the funding for the redevelopment of Gaza". The Peace Board was endorsed, along with the rest of the Plan, by a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2803 on 17 November 2025, and was given a mandate for two years.[2] On 19 February 2026, the BoP convened its inaugural meeting in Washington DC. Additionally, it appointed a high representative for Gaza and various governing bodies, including the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), the body of Palestinian technocrats created to administer the Strip in accordance with the Plan.

The 20-point plan had a meaningful start: the Gaza ceasefire was largely implemented and all Israeli hostages were released. The international enthusiasm that marked the initial announcement, however, soon gave way to scepticism. Progress stalled with the advent of phase II of the Plan (dealing, inter alia, with Hamas disarmament, further Israeli withdrawals in Gaza, and reconstruction), raising questions about the Trump Administration's sustained commitment and attention to the Plan.

The publication of the BoP's Charter[3] raised further alarm as it did not even mention Gaza and instead foresaw an expanded, indefinite mandate for the Board to address conflicts across the globe. This left many countries uneasy about the BoP competing with the UNSC. The French foreign ministry's statement that the BoP "needed to recenter to focus on Gaza in line with a United Nation resolution"[4]—a diplomatic way of saying that it had overreached and overstepped its mandate—reflected the sentiment of many states in Europe and beyond. Even countries that showed initial enthusiasm grew hesitant. For example, Indonesia—which had committed a significant number of troops in support of the Board's mission—announced that "all BoP discussions are on hold as all attention has shifted to the situation in Iran."[5]

Losing Momentum?

The announcement of the Gaza ceasefire in October 2025 witnessed one of the largest gatherings of regional and world leaders regarding the Palestine–Israel conflict in recent memory. In a marked contrast, the inaugural meeting of the Peace Board in February 2026 was only attended by one regional head of state, the king of Bahrain. Other Middle Eastern states mostly sent foreign ministers or even lower-level representatives. Moreover, no permanent member of the UNSC—besides the US—participated. Key European countries either skipped the meeting or participated only as observers.

Beyond diplomatic optics, the BoP's inaugural meeting did not produce a clear, unified position on key next steps in Gaza, particularly regarding the issue of Hamas disarmament. While President Trump, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar and the Board's High Representative Nickolay Mladenov focused on disarmament, Arab speakers largely shied away from explicitly mentioning it.

To be sure, the next steps in Gaza are objectively complex as they require major political decisions from the parties—specifically on disarmament as it relates to Hamas, withdrawals from Gaza, and allowing reconstruction as it relates to Israel. Yet, the failure to produce a unified position by the participants was also due to the lack of sustained high-level attention by the US. The key senior US officials in charge of this portfolio—US Special Envoys for Peace Missions Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner—also handle other demanding portfolios such as Iran and Ukraine. Moreover, the delay in establishing the Peace Board, which occurred three months after the announcement of the ceasefire, allowed Hamas to entrench itself in Gaza and begin rebuilding itself, complicating matters and dampening initial international enthusiasm. The Iran war has further shifted focus away from the BoP. As the world—including the main mediators, Qatar, Türkiye, and Egypt—

is understandably consumed by the war, the situation on the ground has stagnated. Talks regarding Hamas disarmament have failed to produce results, as the group awaits the outcome of the war and the fate of its allies in Tehran. In the meantime, a new reality is crystallising whereby Hamas is tightening its grip on the 47 percent of Gaza under its control, while Israel is solidifying its presence in the remaining 53 percent.

Though the inaugural meeting did succeed in securing pledges of US$17 billion, much of what was discussed in the meeting revolved around polished, futuristic visions of Gaza. The slick presentations of high-end hotels, state-of-the-art internet connectivity and ambitious economic plans seemed detached from the current reality of Gazans who struggle to meet their basic needs. In the intervening months, the lived reality in Gaza has not improved significantly, and pledged funds have been slow to materialise, deepening the lack of trust in the Board. While basic humanitarian aid—stopped in the early days of the war—has resumed,[6] there has been no progress on the rehabilitation of Gaza, let alone on reconstruction. The National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG) remains based in Cairo, unable to enter Gaza.

Moreover, of the US$17 billion, US$10 billion were pledged by the US, setting the US as the leading contributor by a vast margin. The Iran conflict has created additional uncertainty about the future of these pledges. Even before the war, there were concerns regarding the president's ability to produce these funds. The costs created by the war are raising further questions regarding the availability of these funds and congressional willingness to allocate them.

In addition to the US, Gulf states pledged a total of US$4 billion. These funds primarily reflect the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC's) longstanding commitment to aiding Gaza. But the commitment also reflects these countries' desire to remain in lockstep with President Trump. Gulf economies, however, have been significantly impacted by the war, and it can be expected that GCC members will be reexamining their economic priorities once the extent of the damage becomes clear. Moreover, GCC states were against starting the war and, more importantly, are worried that the US may end the war in a way that does not safeguard their interests. These financial and political concerns may impact some of the GCC's contribution to the BoP, particularly if the war ends in a manner that is unsatisfactory to various Gulf capitals.

The loss of momentum does not only impact the future of Gaza, it also undermines the Trump Administration's very vision of the BoP as a platform for international peace diplomacy. This vision is already regarded with suspicion by many countries that believe that the UN's role in addressing global conflicts—flawed as it may be—should be preserved. Several countries have also been concerned by the concentration of power in the hands of the chairman according to the Board's Charter. The unilateral way in which the Iran military campaign was initiated, compounded with the bellicose language used by Trump against various traditional allies during the war, has deepened these concerns.

Next Steps

The impact of the Iran conflict on the BoP can only be judged once the war ends and its aftermath becomes clear. For now, however, the Iran war has created many uncertainties that have added to pre-existing scepticism about the BoP's effectiveness, mission, and decision-making process. To address this, the Peace Board will need to quickly demonstrate its ability to fulfill—or at least make significant progress on—its original mission once the war is over. To that end, Gaza will be the test case. If the BoP can prove that it can successfully manage the implementation of the Gaza Plan, it will gain credibility that can be leveraged towards expanding its role. If it fails in this first task, detractors will feel vindicated and its potential supporters will be hesitant to fully commit.

For the BoP to show consistent progress in advancing the Gaza Plan, the US administration will need to engage in three main lines of effort.

First, it must produce a unified, explicit diplomatic position on Hamas disarmament. Without this, other aspects of the Gaza Plan cannot proceed. While diplomatic positions, forceful as they may be, are unlikely to produce immediate Hamas disarmament, they will create constant pressure on the group. To achieve such an outcome, the BoP will also need to secure Israeli commitment to implementing its obligations under the Plan.

Second, the BoP's high representative must be empowered. While senior US officials will need to engage in high diplomacy with member states, the high representative is the point person for the day-to-day handling of the Gaza portfolio. The Iran war has impeded his ability to deliver, as the attention of senior US officials, as well as key regional mediators, has been consumed by the war. As a result, his most immediate priority—helping establish civilian Palestinian governance in Gaza—is already facing multiple challenges from Hamas, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority. To reverse this, the Peace Board's leadership will need to demonstrate support for the high representative as soon as the war is over.

Third, the NCAG needs to be equipped and empowered to succeed. Ideally, the NCAG should be able to begin its work in Gaza immediately. Realistically, though, Hamas and Israel are unlikely to facilitate that before the end of the war. In the meantime, efforts should focus on securing resources and funding. Once the war is over, the BoP will need to press Israel and regional mediators to ensure that Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas do not undermine its work. Given the entrenchment of Hamas and Israeli positions in the areas of Gaza under their respective control during the war, reversing this and enabling the NCAG to begin its work may require the direct intervention of President Trump.

More broadly, while success in Gaza is a necessary condition for establishing the BoP's credibility, it is not sufficient. As long as the BoP is seen as an effort to undermine the UN and other international organisations, and decision-making remains concentrated in the hands of the chairman, many states will remain reluctant to support it.

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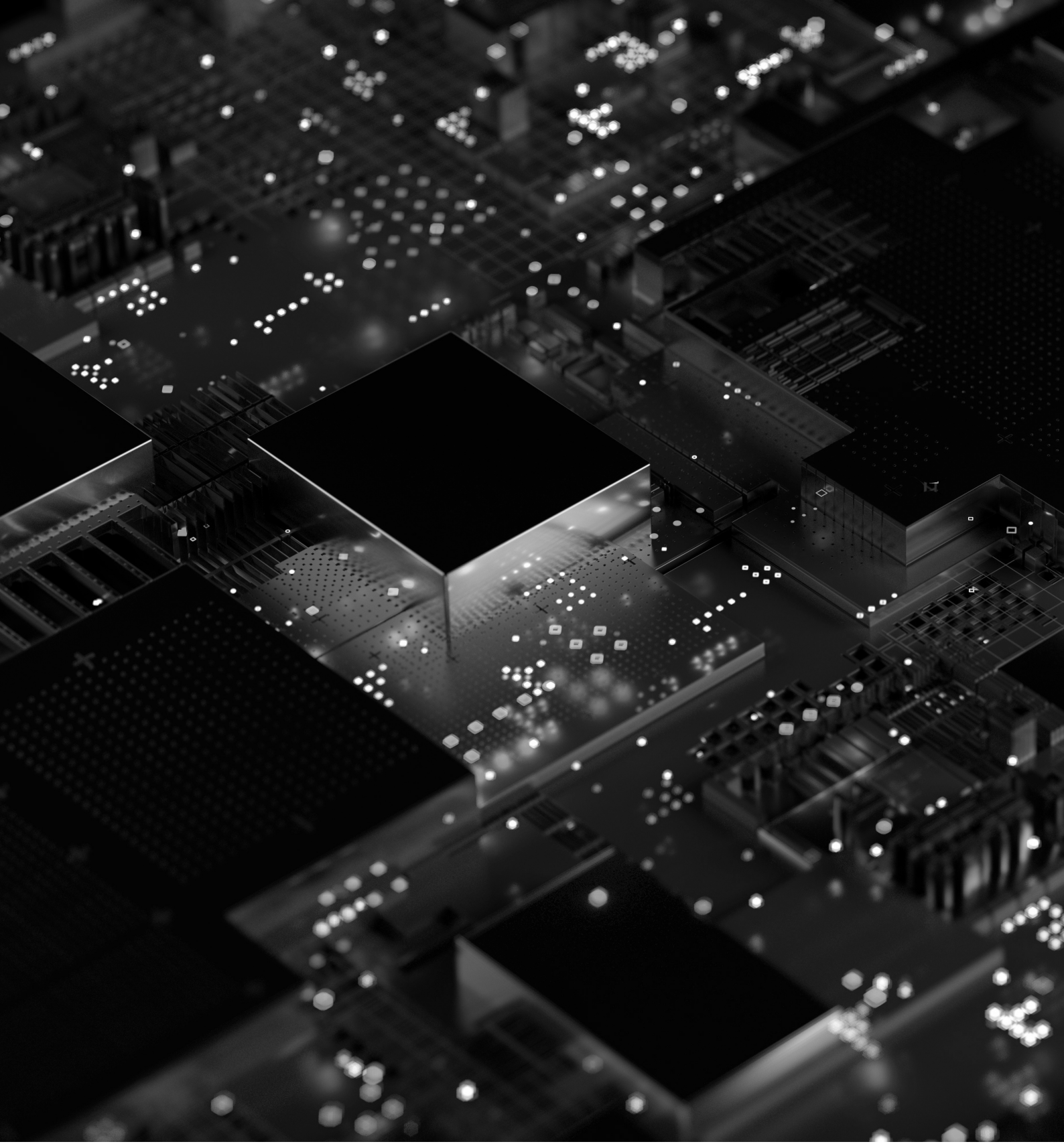

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