

Trump Says U.S. Will Take Over Gaza

Proposal stuns Middle East experts and Trump allies, leaving many questions unanswered

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WASHINGTON—President Trump called for the U.S. to take [long-term control of Gaza](#) and for nearly two million Palestinian residents to permanently leave for neighboring countries, a break with decades of U.S. policy that left the idea of a Palestinian state in tatters.

“The U.S. will take over the Gaza Strip,” Trump said during a press conference alongside Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House. “I do see a long-term ownership position, and I see it bringing great stability to that part of the Middle East, and maybe the entire Middle East.”

The proposal, if implemented, would deeply involve the U.S. in a development project that Trump officials said earlier in the day could take 10 to 15 years. He left unaddressed how the U.S. would [persuade Palestinians to voluntarily surrender](#) their land and whether Israel would ultimately exercise sovereignty in the territory.

Trump didn’t rule out sending U.S. forces to hold Gaza, a deployment that could launch the kind of long-term American military occupation in the Middle East that Trump has long decried.

Trump cited the devastation in Gaza for why the enclave’s residents had to move.

“I hope we can do something where they wouldn’t want to go back,” Trump said. The president added that he would like to see “really good quality housing” built for Palestinians outside Gaza. The rebuilt strip would provide jobs and stability to the region, Trump said, implying without providing details that it would be open to both Israelis and Arabs.

It wasn’t clear how Trump’s plan could be implemented.

The Arab world is likely to reject Trump’s proposal, though initial responses were muted because it was the middle of the night there when the news conference happened. Late on Tuesday, the Saudi foreign ministry said the kingdom rejected “any violation of the rights of the Palestinian people, whether through settlement,

land annexation, or attempts to displace them.” Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar have also rejected evictions, while the Palestinian Authority and Hamas say they wouldn’t support an evacuation of Gaza.

With Hamas badly damaged but still intact in Gaza, any attempt to move Palestinians out of the territory would likely be met with attacks and continued armed resistance.

With Gaza under military occupation as a result of Israel’s 15-month war with Hamas, Israel would have to play a major role in any plan to empty Gaza of its residents. Netanyahu didn’t directly address Trump’s ideas at their joint press conference.

Netanyahu said during the press conference that one of his key goals was to ensure Gaza wouldn’t host terrorists again. Trump, he continued, took that concept “to a much higher level.”

“It is something that could change history, and it is worthwhile really pursuing this avenue,” Netanyahu said.

Right-wing Israeli politicians have called for resettlement of Gaza and some have even endorsed postwar annexation of the territory. But Netanyahu’s government hasn’t endorsed taking over postwar Gaza, much less anything like what Trump proposed.

Itamar Ben Gvir, a far-right politician who dropped out of Netanyahu’s government over efforts to end the war, posted on X: “Donald, this looks like the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”

Removing Gaza from Palestinian hands would detach a significant portion of Palestinian territory that U.S. presidents—including the first Trump administration—have said for decades would form part of an eventual Palestinian state.

Trump has yet to publicly address whether he has any plan to revive the moribund process aimed at achieving a Palestinian state alongside Israel, a goal that would be all the harder if the U.S. pressures Gaza residents into abandoning their land.

Congressional Republicans and Democrats expressed skepticism at the idea of the U.S. taking over Gaza.

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R., S.C.), a Trump ally, called the proposal interesting but problematic and said his constituents wouldn’t like the idea. Sen. Ruben Gallego (D., Ariz.), a former Marine, said Trump was outlining an invasion of Gaza.

Middle East experts were stunned.

Khaled Elgindy, a former senior adviser to the Palestinian Authority in negotiations with Israelis, called Trump's proposal "truly bizarre and incoherent."

"None of it makes any sense. Is he looking to develop Gaza as some kind of massive beachfront property? Is he talking about a U.S. occupation of Gaza? Will the U.S. force out two million Palestinians as part of the plan?" asked Elgindy, now at Georgetown.

White House officials argued that mass relocation from Gaza was the only viable option and that they could persuade Egypt and Jordan to accept displaced Palestinians. Trump has invited Jordan's King Abdullah and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi to the White House for talks later this month.

Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff said the three- to five-year timeline called for in the [cease-fire agreement](#) for reconstruction of Gaza's shattered housing and infrastructure isn't realistic. A more accurate estimate is 10 to 15 years, a senior official said.

"At some point, we have to look realistically. How do you rebuild Gaza?" said White House national-security adviser Mike Waltz. "What does that look like? What's the timeline? These people are sitting with literally thousands of unexploded ordnance, in piles of rubble."

U.S. officials have yet to outline how they will remove Palestinians from Gaza if they don't leave voluntarily. Moving forward with the plan could also undercut Trump and Netanyahu's larger goal of [reaching a normalization agreement](#) between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

But even as Trump was outlining his chimerical ideas, he admitted that he was uncertain a fragile cease-fire between [Israel and Hamas](#) in Gaza would survive.

"I'm hopeful that this cease-fire could be the beginning of a larger and more enduring peace that will end the bloodshed and killing once and for all," Trump said. But he added, "I can't tell you whether the cease-fire will hold."

Trump dismissed the many obstacles, even suggesting that Saudi Arabia might proceed with plans to establish diplomatic ties with Israel. But the Saudi Foreign Ministry pushed back Tuesday night, saying it wouldn't support normalization of ties with Israel until there was a clear path toward a Palestinian state. The ministry said it would oppose any efforts to "displace the Palestinian people from their land."

It is also unclear how the plan would align with Trump's other Middle East goals, especially toward Iran. Netanyahu has long tried to convince Trump that military force is the most effective way to disarm Iran.

Trump's plans for Iran are another murky part of his Middle East agenda, at one moment appearing to encourage Netanyahu to strike Iran's nuclear facilities, something that could trigger a war, while simultaneously saying he wants to avoid a war and cut a deal with Tehran.

Before meeting Netanyahu, he signed an order to reimpose "maximum pressure" on Iran, a first step toward toughening enforcement of sanctions on Iranian oil exports and other parts of the Iranian economy imposed during his first term.

The president said he was "torn" about signing the memorandum. "Everybody wants me to sign it," he said.

He didn't rule out supporting Israel if it decides to strike Iran to prevent it from [acquiring a nuclear weapon](#). "We just don't want them to have a nuclear weapon," he said, adding, "We'll see what happens."