

The damage of Trump's Gaza plan has already been done

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The proposal to cleanse Gaza of Palestinians tapped into a deep undercurrent in Israeli society — endangering any chance for a peaceful future in the region.

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A large billboard posted by the Ayalon highway in Tel Aviv, in support of U.S. President Donald Trump, Feb. 5, 2025. (Miriam Alster/Flash90)

In September 2020, toward the end of his first term as president, Donald Trump oversaw the signing of the [Abraham Accords](#) between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain on the White House lawn. The deals, to which Sudan and Morocco would also become parties in the months to follow, were proclaimed as “peace agreements,” but it would have been more accurate to label them “agreements to sideline the Palestinian people.” Their goal was not to create peace — there was no war between these states in the first place — but rather to establish a new regional reality in which the Palestinian liberation struggle would be marginalized and ultimately forgotten.

The four and a half years that followed have been the bloodiest in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Half a year after the agreements were signed, Israeli forces attacked Ramadan worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque and moved to evict Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of Jerusalem, triggering a barrage of Hamas rockets from Gaza and an eruption of intercommunal violence between Jews ([backed by](#) Israeli soldiers and police) and Palestinians that engulfed the entire land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River for the first time since 1948. 2022 and 2023 saw [record numbers](#) of Palestinians killed by Israeli soldiers and settlers, as well as a [spike](#) in attacks on Israelis. Then came October 7, the ultimate proof that trying to sideline the Palestinian struggle is like ignoring a highway divider: it ends in a fatal collision.

Whether or not Trump understands this, his new approach essentially says: if we can't bypass the Palestinians, let's expel them. “I heard that Gaza has been very unlucky for them,” [he said](#) in a joint press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu earlier this week, adding that it would therefore be best if the entire population of the Strip moved to a “good, fresh, beautiful piece of land.”

One of the first criteria by which the idea has been examined is its feasibility. By this measure, it obviously fails. The chances that more than 2 million Palestinians — most of them refugees or descendants of refugees from the Nakba of 1948, who for 75 years have remained in refugee camps in Gaza rather than leave their homeland — would now agree to leave it are close to zero.

The likelihood that countries like Jordan or Egypt would accept even a fraction of that population is

equally slim, as such a move could destabilize their regimes. And the idea that the United States, after putting an end to long, expensive, and deadly occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan, would now be willing to “own” Gaza, govern it, and develop it seems just as far-fetched.

But this plan is worse than the sum of its parts. Even if it does not advance even by an inch, it has already had a profound impact on Jewish-Israeli political discourse. Indeed, it would perhaps be more accurate to say that Trump’s proposal has tapped into a deep undercurrent in Jewish-Israeli society.

U.S. President Donald Trump meets with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House in Washington D.C., Feb. 4, 2025. (Liri Agami/Flash90)

Standing alongside Trump at the press conference, Netanyahu was the first to welcome the president’s initiative. “This is the kind of thinking that can reshape the Middle East and bring peace,” he proclaimed. To nobody’s surprise, the leaders of Israel’s messianic right were also quick to express their own glee at the proposal, treating Trump’s press conference as if it were divine revelation. But they were far from the only ones.

Benny Gantz, who [quit the government](#) over the direction of the war in Gaza, [described](#) Trump’s transfer plan as “creative, original, and interesting.” Yair Lapid, head of the centrist Yesh Atid party, [called](#) the press conference “good for Israel.” Yair Golan, leader of the Zionist-left Democrats party, merely [commented](#) on the idea’s impracticality. It was as if politicians across the Zionist spectrum had simply been waiting for the moment when ethnic cleansing would receive a “Made in America” stamp of approval before embracing it.

This transferist poison will not be purged from Israel’s bloodstream anytime soon. And the consequences could be catastrophic for the entire region.

No incentives for negotiations

Even without American boots on the ground, the feeling that Israel has stumbled upon a historic opportunity to empty the Gaza Strip of its Palestinian inhabitants will give enormous momentum to the demands of Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir, who are urging Netanyahu to [blow up the ceasefire](#) before it reaches its second phase, [conquer Gaza](#), and [rebuild Jewish settlements](#) in the Strip. Netanyahu, who appeared somewhat embarrassed by Trump’s bluntness, [himself favors](#) the idea of “thinning out” Gaza’s population and may well give in to these demands, especially amid fears that he could lose his coalition.

As for the Israeli army, a senior official was [quoted](#) by the Israeli news site Ynet calling Trump’s initiative “an excellent idea.” Meanwhile, the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), the army body responsible for overseeing humanitarian affairs in Gaza and the West Bank, has [already begun](#) putting the plans together. If, for instance, Egypt refuses to allow the Rafah Crossing to be used to facilitate Gaza’s ethnic cleansing, the army can open other routes “from the sea or land and from there to an airport to transfer the Palestinians to destination countries.”

Even if the ceasefire does proceed into phases two and three, the hostages are all released, the army withdraws from Gaza, and a permanent ceasefire is achieved, Trump’s plan will not disappear from Jewish-Israeli politics. What incentive would any government or party have to push for a political agreement with the Palestinians if the Jewish public sees their expulsion as a viable alternative? Every agreement, every ceasefire, might come to be seen as nothing more than a temporary step toward the ultimate goal of mass transfer. The possibilities for effective Jewish-Palestinian political cooperation will shrink significantly.

And why stop with Gaza? There's no particular reason Trump's proposal couldn't be expanded to Palestinians in the West Bank — an area which he likely also considers “very unlucky” for them — or East Jerusalem, or even Nazareth.

Israeli flags are seen at the Philadelphi Corridor between the southern Gaza Strip and Egypt, July 15, 2024. (Oren Cohen/Flash90)

On the Palestinian street, Trump's plan will only further undermine any notion of reconciliation with Israel. Sometimes enthusiastically, sometimes grudgingly, but ever since the Oslo Accords in 1993 (and even before that), the Palestinian political leadership has affirmed the possibility of living alongside a state that was born through the mass displacement and atop the ruins of their own people in 1948. This was certainly never clear-cut; there were many obstacles, much double-speak, and plenty of violent opposition — not least from Hamas — but this approach remained dominant for decades.

Once the American president proposes transfer as a solution to the “Palestinian problem,” and once all of Israel — from the religious-fascist right to the liberal center and even the Zionist left — embraces it, the message to Palestinians is clear: there is no possibility of compromise with Israel and its American patron, at least in its current form, because they are determined to eliminate the Palestinian people.

This does not necessarily mean that masses of Palestinians will immediately take up armed struggle, though that is one potential outcome. But it will certainly make it impossible for any Palestinian leader who tries to reach an agreement with Israel to maintain popular support. The Palestinian Authority's legitimacy is already on the floor; by re-entering into a political process with Israel in the shadow of Trump's plan, it will only deteriorate further.

A recipe for all-out regional war

And the danger does not end there. Trump, in his complete ignorance of the Middle East (throughout the press conference, he repeatedly stated that “both Arabs and Muslims” would benefit from the prosperity his plan would bring), has “regionalized” the Palestinian question, seeing its resolution not as a matter for Jews and Palestinians living between the river and the sea, but instead dumping this responsibility onto the surrounding states. He is not only demanding that Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and other countries agree to accept hundreds of thousands of Palestinians into their territories, but is also effectively asking them to sign off on burying the Palestinian cause.

Such a demand is a direct threat to the regimes of the Arab world. The Jordanian government fears that a significant influx of Palestinians into its kingdom could bring about its downfall by disrupting the country's delicate demographic balance, which already tilts heavily Palestinian. But even in other countries with a less direct connection to Palestine, the situation is just as fragile. One only had to watch Saudi news channels on the day of Trump's announcement to grasp the level of shock, threat, and fear surrounding this move.

Fifteen years before the PLO made a historic compromise with the State of Israel, Egypt had concluded that not only could it come to terms with Israel's existence in the region, but it could also benefit from it, and signed the 1979 peace treaty. Jordan followed suit, and four and a half years ago, the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco embraced the same line of thinking. Even without having officially normalized with Israel, regional heavyweight Saudi Arabia seems to have reached a similar conclusion.

President Donald Trump walks with Mohammed bin Salman along the West Colonnade of the White

House, Tuesday, March 14, 2017. (Shealah Craighead/Official White House Photo)

But Trump's bulldozing move, and Israel's instinctive embrace of it, could signal to Middle Eastern regimes — including those labeled as "moderate" (which, in reality, are often more autocratic than the rest) — that compromise is futile. It suggests that Israel, thanks to its military power and U.S. backing, believes it can impose any solution it desires on the region, including the forced displacement of millions from their homeland and the denial of their near-universally recognized right to self-determination.

Over the past year and a half, Israel was not satisfied with mass killings in Gaza and the destruction of the infrastructure necessary for human life. It also occupied parts of Lebanon, and is refusing to withdraw in violation of the ceasefire agreement; and it has seized parts of Syria with no intention of leaving anytime soon. This reality only reinforces the impression that Israel has decided it can establish a new order in the Middle East through sheer force — without any agreements, and without any negotiations.

The 1973 War was the last time Israel fought against the armies of sovereign states rather than non-state militant organizations, which have always been far weaker. Even if Israeli history textbooks [now claim that Israel bore no responsibility](#) for that war, there is no doubt that Egypt and Syria launched it because they realized there was no chance of peacefully recovering the territories Israel had occupied in 1967.

The path Israel is now following, under Trump's influence, could lead it to the same place, where its neighbors conclude that Israel only understands force. Indeed, [Middle East Eye quoted sources](#) in Amman stating that Jordan is prepared to declare war on Israel if Netanyahu attempts to forcibly transfer Palestinian refugees into its territory.

This is not inevitable, of course. A great deal depends on Trump's whim, and how determined he is to follow through on his statements in the face of global opposition. The resistance must come not only from Palestinians but also from Jews in Israel who understand that they have no future here without living in equality with the land's native inhabitants. It could also come in the form of new coalitions in the Middle East and beyond that refuse to accept American dictates.

What is clear is that Trump's bellicose schemes, and Israel's pathetic attempt to ride the wave, carry the very real risk of being met with force. And that would be disastrous for everyone.

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P.S.

• +972 Magazine. February 7, 2025:
<https://www.972mag.com/trump-gaza-damage-israeli-society/>

A version of this article was first published in Hebrew on Local Call. Read it [here](#).

• Meron Rapoport's article on +972 Magazine:
<https://www.972mag.com/writer/meron-raपोport/>

• Meron Rapoport is an editor at Local Call.

Our team has been devastated by the horrific events of this latest war. The world is reeling from Israel's unprecedented onslaught on Gaza, inflicting mass devastation and death upon besieged Palestinians, as well as the atrocious attack and kidnappings by Hamas in Israel on October 7. Our hearts are with all the people and communities facing this violence.

We are in an extraordinarily dangerous era in Israel-Palestine. The bloodshed has reached extreme levels of brutality and threatens to engulf the entire region. Emboldened settlers in the West Bank, backed by the army, are seizing the opportunity to intensify their attacks on Palestinians. The most far-right government in Israel's history is ramping up its policing of dissent, using the cover of war to silence Palestinian citizens and left-wing Jews who object to its policies.

This escalation has a very clear context, one that +972 has spent the past 14 years covering: Israeli society's growing racism and militarism, entrenched occupation and apartheid, and a normalized siege on Gaza.

We are well positioned to cover this perilous moment - but we need your help to do it. This terrible period will challenge the humanity of all of those working for a better future in this land. Palestinians and Israelis are already organizing and strategizing to put up the fight of their lives.

Can we count on your [support](#)? +972 Magazine is a leading media voice of this movement, a desperately needed platform where Palestinian and Israeli journalists, activists, and thinkers can report on and analyze what is happening, guided by humanism, equality, and justice. Join us.

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