

Analysis | Trump's Ultimatum Upends Gaza Cease-fire and Could Derail Hostage Release

Tuesday 11 February 2025, by [HAREL Amos](#) (Date first published: 11 February 2025).

Israel's right is thrilled by Trump's statement, which could give Netanyahu the green light to withdraw from his commitment to advance the second stage of the hostage deal. Dozens of hostages could die, but it is unclear whether Trump or Netanyahu care

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the Tel Aviv District Court, on Monday. Credit: Tomer Appelbaum

The large camp of supporters of the hostage deal in Israel – a clear majority of the public, according to all polls – is now undergoing the same painful reckoning that opponents of the deal experienced just weeks ago.

After more than a year of stalled negotiations, frustration led many to pin their hopes on incoming U.S. President Donald Trump. He seemed to validate those hopes by forcing the parties into a [new hostage deal](#), signed on the eve of his inauguration.

But just three and a half weeks later – though it feels like an eternity – this led to frustration and disappointment within the Israeli right, some of whom experienced what seemed almost like a crisis of faith in light of the surprise over the American president's actions.

But Trump remains Trump – an unpredictable and unmanageable force of nature. A week ago, he [dropped a bombshell](#) by unveiling a vague, hastily formed plan for the supposed voluntary migration of all Palestinian residents out of Gaza. The plan, which may not even be formally documented, has since undergone countless changes – at least in Trump's [public statements](#).

On Tuesday, he reiterated his commitment to pushing it forward and even threatened to withhold billions in aid from Jordan and Egypt if they refused to accept refugees from Gaza. This came after Hamas, along with all Sunni Arab regimes allied with Washington, expressed fierce opposition to the idea.

U.S. President Donald Trump at the White House, on Monday. Credit: Andrew Caballero-Reynolds/AFP

Yet for Israel, that wasn't even the night's biggest headline. On Monday, Hamas announced it was freezing the implementation of the first phase of the hostage deal, citing dubious claims of Israeli violations.

The organization stated that the next planned phase, in which three additional hostages set to be freed this Saturday, would be postponed indefinitely unless Israel addressed these alleged infractions.

Israel condemned the move harshly, and the IDF raised its alert level around Gaza, preparing both for a potential Hamas provocation and a possible government decision to end the cease-fire and resume fighting.

After midnight, Trump poured more fuel on the fire. He [declared](#) that if Hamas did not release all the hostages by Saturday at noon, the cease-fire should be scrapped that Israel should “let all hell break loose.”

He also rejected the current phased-release strategy, where small groups of hostages are freed weekly. “It’s time to come up with a [final] date ... two people, three people? I don’t think you can do that anymore.” Trump added that he believed Hamas would not comply and said he would soon speak with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu about Israel’s expected response.

Were it not for the fact that these events concern our people [languishing in tunnels](#) in Gaza, they could serve as a fascinating case study in international relations. What approach is most effective against a manipulative and ruthless terrorist organization? Can sheer force compel it to change its stance?

Hostage families protest on the main Tel-Aviv Jerusalem highway, on Tuesday. Credit: Naama Grynbaum

It’s no surprise that the Israeli far right is ecstatic over Trump’s statements - nor that the hostage families, who only weeks ago saw him as their unlikely hero, are now gripped by fear. Predicting Trump’s next move is no longer the task of analysts or intelligence officers; an astrologer or fortune-teller might have equal success.

Right-wing enthusiasm hinges on the assumption that Netanyahu and his close ally, Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer, have found a way to influence Trump and shape his responses. The president’s latest moves - including his extreme migration proposal - indeed seem to align with Israeli government interests.

Netanyahu likely sees the crisis triggered first by Hamas and then by Trump as an opportunity to escape his reluctant commitment to moving forward with the next stage of the deal.

But life is not a Hollywood movie, and while Trump’s demand that Hamas stop tormenting hostages and release them immediately is justified, he is also playing with fire.

It is difficult to predict how Hamas will respond to the American ultimatum. Does it have anything to lose? What will Israel and the U.S. do if it refuses? And if the IDF resumes its offensive in Gaza, will that necessarily lead to an Israeli victory? Despite Netanyahu’s repeated assurances, nearly 16 months of war have failed to deliver a decisive win over Hamas. Why should this time be any different? And how many hostages will be killed in the process?

Until recently, the prevailing assumption was that Trump’s main focus was reshaping the regional order - ending the war in Gaza, brokering a major U.S.-Saudi deal, securing Israeli-Saudi normalization, and, of course, winning a Nobel Peace Prize.

His latest actions suggest that he now sees Hamas as an obstacle to those ambitions. Perhaps, through his threats, he has given Netanyahu the green light to abandon the hostage deal and prioritize dismantling Hamas. Along the way, dozens of hostages could die - but it is unclear whether that reality concerns Trump or Netanyahu in the slightest.

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P.S.

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<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-02-11/ty-article/.premium/trumps-ultimatum-upends-gaza-cease-fire-and-could-derail-hostage-release/00000194-f401-dc8e-a9d6-f5614eb40000>

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