

Why Netanyahu is betting on Trump's 'New Gaza': A riviera watered by blood

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Netanyahu bet on Trump's return, turning his back on Israelis in captivity. Now, as Israelis reel from images and testimonies of Hamas abuse, he's hoping Trump's radical 'solution' for Gaza will gain traction and aid his own political survival, Israeli hostages and Gazan civilians be damned

U.S. President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the Oval Office on February 4, 2025.

It is a perfect storm of hubris, idiocy, immorality, venality and political bankruptcy.

For many long months of war, Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, bided his time, betting on the electoral success of now-U.S. President Donald Trump, content to flick away the pleas of families of Israeli hostages kept in grotesque conditions of abject abuse and torture. He batted away the Biden administration's May 2024 cease-fire proposal, intent on satisfying his far-right coalition partners, while combating its lukewarm sanctions on mega-bombs with frenzied accusations that the White House's behavior was "[inconceivable](#)" and intended to throw Israel to the lions.

But Trump's proposed 'solution' for the Palestinians of Gaza goes beyond even Netanyahu & Co.'s wildest, autocratic, annexationist dreams, for which the president has been celebrated as the "[messenger of God](#)" sent to clear Gaza of its inhabitants to pave the way for Israeli settlers.

This plan not only mainstreams what was still largely an extremists-only idea of 'transfer,' the Israeli euphemism for ethnic cleansing, while presenting Gaza as a real estate prospectus, pleasure-domes for foreign investors. It also threatens the long-standing [peace agreements](#) between Israel on the one hand, and Jordan and Egypt on the other, and the entire hostage/cease-fire deal, on which the hostages' very lives - and those of yet more Gazan civilians - depend.

When three pale, emaciated hostages were released by Hamas last Saturday, there was an almost palpable gasp across Israel, and immediate comparisons to Holocaust survivors. As more hostages are released, they provide eye-witness testimony about the appalling conditions in which Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad held them, and are still holding dozens more: starvation, shackles, suffocation, psychological abuse.

It may be grim, but it is not surprising, that those images and stories, along with the still-raw memories of October 7 and the subsequent 15 month war, helped fuel Israelis' receptivity to the Trump plan. In recent polls, around 70 percent of Israelis are in favor, even if they think it's unfeasible. It's the ultimate wish fulfillment: Shut your eyes and the Palestinians in Gaza are gone.

For a moment, Netanyahu probably thought that the timely collision of the Trump plan and the outrage at gaunt survivors offered him a perfect political game plan. His core priority is to eke out time in power, keeping the far right on board, keeping on the right side of the president, keeping

open the option of restarting war.

If the public was already radicalized enough to show interest in 'transfer,' then perhaps the distressing appearance of the hostages, and the frightening mob scenes in Gaza at the release of a woman hostage, Arbel Yehoud, the week before, would [radicalize](#) the public enough to embrace more war until Netanyahu's ever-elusive "total victory." And maybe that could happen before Israel was committed to negotiating Stage 2 of the deal, in which all the remaining hostages would be released in exchange for a full IDF withdrawal from Gaza - and a full withdrawal of the far right from his coalition.

However, Netanyahu can't plot the whole script. Israelis are indeed as revolted as ever by Hamas - but they want the hostages out. The hostages' grim appearance was a call to action, not to war but to basic human solidarity: Save them, now, while we still can.

During the war, Netanyahu has been impervious to public protests, and to prioritizing the hostages. Trump has four years of an increasingly imperial presidency ahead of him. The fear in the air in Israel and Gaza now is that they'll blow up the cease-fire deal, hostages and Gazans be damned, and blow up what's left to level the ground for a New Gaza, a riviera watered by blood.

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