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Takeaways from Trump and Netanyahu's meeting in Florida

2 HR AGO

By Adam Cancryn

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump speak to reporters ...



President Donald Trump's Monday meeting in Florida with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu generated plenty of warm words — but no clear progress in their peace plan for Gaza.

The leaders held a private lunch at Mar-a-Lago aimed at working out a series of

issues in the Middle East, as the two sides try to cement a lasting end to Israel's war with Hamas and ensure broader peace throughout the region.

Trump at the outset of the session told reporters that he planned to speak with Netanyahu about "five major subjects," later suggesting that they'd come close to settling three of them within the first five minutes of their session.

In addition to Gaza, Trump indicated plans to address issues in the occupied West Bank and potential threats posed by Iran.

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But more than an hour later, the two emerged with no new milestones to announce.

Instead, they were seemingly content to shower praise on each other, with Netanyahu going as far as to announce that he planned to award Trump with Israel's highest civilian excellence honor.

"President Trump has broken so many conventions to surprise people, so we decided to break a convention or create a new one," Netanyahu said.

Netanyahu's visit marked the **second major trip** to Mar-a-Lago by a foreign leader in as many days, as Trump engages in an end-of-year **foreign policy flurry**.

Here are the takeaways from Monday's meeting:

Intense flattery, lingering divisions

Trump and Netanyahu spent much of their time in public together exchanging compliments, as both sought to show their relationship remains better than ever despite the occasional strains of the past year — and Trump's growing wariness of some of Israel's actions amid his efforts to keep peace in the Middle East.

"We've never had a friend like President Trump in the White House. It's not even close," Netanyahu said upon his arrival.

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Trump returned the favor moments later, asserting that "Israel, with most other leaders, would not exist today."

"The relationship's been extraordinary," Trump said.

The flattery only intensified from there, capped by Netanyahu's announcement that he would make Trump the first non-Israeli recipient of the Israel Prize for Peace.

Trump, who called the award “really surprising and very much appreciated,” praised Netanyahu as a “wartime” leader and downplayed concerns that Israel is not moving **fast enough toward** the next phase of the Gaza peace deal. He instead put the onus almost entirely on Hamas.

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But he did acknowledge ongoing divisions between the US and Israel, chiefly over the West Bank. Trump has **opposed Israel annexing the area**, aligning himself with many Western and Arab nations on the issue. The Israeli government, meanwhile, has discussed annexing parts of the West Bank in the past and **intensified its military operations** in the area since the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023.

“We’ve had a discussion, big discussion, for a long time on the West Bank, and I wouldn’t say we agree on the West Bank 100%,” Trump told CNN’s Kevin Liptak.

Phase 2 in Gaza still on hold

Trump and Netanyahu also failed to reach an agreement on moving to the second phase of the US-brokered peace plan for Gaza — a sticking point that’s slowed work toward permanent peace and an eventual rebuilding effort.

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Trump on Monday downplayed the lack of progress, insisting that he was “not concerned” about Israel’s actions in the region, even though its military has killed **hundreds of Palestinians** since the ceasefire took effect in October. Instead, he argued the plan’s success depends mainly on Hamas agreeing to disarmament.

But that’s unlikely to alleviate concerns within the Trump administration that Netanyahu is slow-walking the move to the next phase, leaving the US mired in the Middle East at a moment when Republicans are urging Trump to turn his focus to domestic matters.

Trump seemed to allude to the difficulty of the negotiations at one point, suggesting that Netanyahu was skeptical of giving “second chances” in an effort to ensure the ceasefire remains permanent. Still, he told reporters that “Israel’s lived up to the plan 100%.”

“They’re strong. They’re solid,” Trump said.

Grave warnings for Iran

Trump had a far clearer message on Iran, amid Israel’s warnings that the nation is trying to rebuild its missile capabilities following **US strikes** on a trio of nuclear sites earlier this year.

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The president vowed to strike Iran again if he determined the nation was pursuing an expansion of its ballistic missile program, saying he'd heard indications of building at new sites within the country.

"I hear that Iran is trying to build up again, and if they are, we're going to have to knock them down," he said, adding, "We'll knock the hell out of them."

Trump later threatened "very powerful" consequences for Iran, urging the country to instead seek a deal with the US to avoid more military action. But he repeatedly struck a pessimistic note even while expressing hope that more strikes could be avoided.

"This is just what we hear," Trump said of Iran's actions. "Usually, where there's smoke, there's fire."

Foreign policy dominates Trump's attention

Even aside from Netanyahu's visit, Trump's Mar-a-Lago holiday vacation has so far been consumed by the various foreign entanglements that shaped his first year back in office.

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In between bidding farewell to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and greeting Netanyahu, Trump spent Monday morning on the phone with Russian President Vladimir Putin. He later said Putin told him that a **Ukrainian drone**

attack targeted one of his residences, an allegation that Trump said made him “very angry.”

“This is not the right time,” Trump said, even as he conceded it was possible the allegation was false.

The president also offered a few new details on an operation he said targeted a **“big facility” in Venezuela** — an incident that became public only because he mentioned it offhand during a prior radio interview.

“It’s an implementation area,” Trump said of the dock that he claimed was being used to “load the boats up with drugs.”

But he declined to say much more, leaving the next steps in Venezuela — as well as in Ukraine and the Middle East — unclear by the end of the day.



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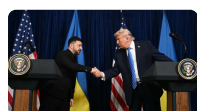
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