



## Middle East crisis — explained

# Trump says the U.S. will 'take over' Gaza and relocate its people. What does it mean?

UPDATED FEBRUARY 5, 2025 · 2:14 PM ET ⓘ

HEARD ON [ALL THINGS CONSIDERED](#)

By

[Daniel Estrin](#)

,

[Kat Lonsdorf](#)



President Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speak during a news conference in the East Room of the White House on Tuesday.

*Alex Brandon/AP*

TEL AVIV, Israel — President Trump [floated two bombshell ideas Tuesday](#) about Gaza that has Palestinians, Israelis and the wider Middle East scrambling.

The first: that the U.S. would take over the territory. "The U.S. will take over the Gaza Strip," Trump said in a White House press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "We'll own it ... We have an opportunity to do something that could be phenomenal ... the Riviera of the Middle East."



MIDDLE EAST CRISIS — EXPLAINED

### Trump says he wants the U.S. to take ownership of the Gaza Strip

The second: that [Gaza's entire population](#) would relocate to other countries. "We should go to other countries of interest with humanitarian hearts, and there are many of them that want to do this, and build various domains that will ultimately be occupied by the 1.8 million Palestinians living in Gaza, ending the death and destruction and, frankly, bad luck," he said.

Trump presented no specifics about how the U.S. would execute his proposals. At a press conference Wednesday, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said, "The president has not committed to putting boots on the ground in Gaza." She also said the U.S. would not pay for Gaza reconstruction but would work with allies in the region to rebuild the territory.

Yet Trump's ideas Tuesday were met with fierce resistance from Arab and Palestinian leaders, who have long hoped Gaza and the West Bank would form the basis for a future Palestinian state alongside Israel.

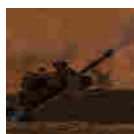
Hamas has also rejected the idea, as it prepares this week to negotiate with Israel on the next phase of their tenuous [ceasefire agreement](#) in Gaza. The two sides have been exchanging hostages and prisoners after a 15-month war that has traumatized both societies and left much of Gaza a wasteland, and Trump's statements add more uncertainty to the future of Gaza and the ceasefire.

Here's how the region is making sense of Trump's words:

### **Israeli observers are taking Trump's words with a "grain of salt"**

An Israeli official, who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity, said Trump had "proposed ingenious solutions to problems that have accompanied Israel since its existence" and described the visit as "historic."

Former Israeli officials, however, cast doubt on the viability of a U.S. takeover of Gaza and removal of its population.



#### **Middle East crisis — explained**

"On the day that I will see American soldiers coming in great numbers to Gaza, I will then make up my mind how serious it is," former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told NPR. "Every party involved except for Israel is completely against it."

"It is utterly unrealistic, and it reflects a total lack of understanding of the historical process of where these Palestinians come from, what is their collective identity," former Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami told NPR. "It's somebody that came from the outer space and tries to impose a solution which is, you know, detached from a context."

Israeli observers have suggested Trump could be using a negotiating tactic known in Israel as "putting in a goat" — laying down a demand for the purpose of removing it later and appearing to have granted a concession.

"This man is an actor in a global theater, and this has been his tactics, playing big, drawing the world's attention to what he says, getting his rivals out of balance, and eventually something will happen that goes his way," Ben-Ami said. "Maybe this is a tactical sort of move that tries to say a big thing in order to eventually get a more modest solution."

A similar scenario played out in Trump's first term: [Netanyahu declared Israel would annex parts](#) of the West Bank under Trump's Israeli-Palestinian peace plan, then tabled annexation in exchange for a Trump-brokered deal for diplomatic relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates.

The negotiations Trump oversees now involve the future of Hamas rule in Gaza, and a deal for Saudi Arabia to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.

"Trump must be taken with a grain of salt," Israeli journalist Amir Ettinger [wrote Wednesday](#) in the right-leaning *Israel Hayom* newspaper. "Senior figures in Israel do not rule out that a similar scenario could occur regarding the Gaza migration issue. The plan might be that Gaza is eventually taken off the table in exchange for the return of the hostages, the expulsion of Hamas leaders and many of its operatives, and normalization with Saudi Arabia without demands in exchange for promises regarding a Palestinian state."

Whether or not it is a viable vision, the once-fringe Israeli idea of "transfer" — expelling or encouraging the emigration of Palestinians to other countries so Israel can take over their land — has quickly moved further into the Israeli mainstream with [Trump's comments in recent weeks](#) about relocating Gazans.

In a poll published Monday, about [7 out of 10 Israelis](#) supported the idea, with most Jewish Israelis polled calling it a "practical plan that should be pursued." Most Arab citizens of Israel polled opposed the idea in the survey, conducted by the Jewish People Policy Institute think tank in Jerusalem.

Netanyahu did not explicitly endorse the idea Tuesday, but Trump's statements serve a useful political purpose for the Israeli leader: They allow Netanyahu to appease his ultranationalist political partners who support expelling Gazans — and who have threatened to bring down the government if Israel does not end the ceasefire and return to fighting in Gaza.

Both Trump and Netanyahu were noncommittal Tuesday about extending the ceasefire deal under negotiation with Hamas. Israeli observers say the attention-grabbing headlines of Trump's plans for Gaza distract from what Netanyahu and Trump may have agreed to behind closed doors — potentially a commitment not to resume the Gaza war.

**Hamas, Palestinian leadership and other world leaders reject Trump's**

## idea

Trump's comments contradict other goals he has said he wants for the Middle East — like [continuing the ceasefire in Gaza](#) and finalizing a deal that would normalize relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia.



ALL TECH CONSIDERED

### What Will Trump's Twitter Strategy Be When He Becomes President?

In a statement released by the militant group early Wednesday, Hamas called on Trump to retract his "irresponsible statements," saying that they would "pour oil on the fire."

The Palestinian leadership in the occupied West Bank — rivals of Hamas who hope to take part in governing postwar Gaza — also rejected the proposal. "We will not allow the rights of our people, for which we have struggled for decades and made great sacrifices to achieve, to be infringed upon," said Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

Trump's plan also goes against the central demand from Saudi Arabia for any normalization of relations with Israel: a pathway to a viable Palestinian state.

While Saudi Arabia didn't respond directly to Trump's comments, hours after the press conference, the country's Foreign Ministry released [a statement](#), saying that its position on establishing a Palestinian state was "firm and unwavering," and rejecting attempts to displace the Palestinian people from "their land."

United Nations human rights chief [Volker Türk](#) said [international law](#) clearly states that "any forcible transfer in or deportation of people from occupied territory is strictly prohibited."

European countries also voiced concern about what the plan would mean for Palestinians.

British Foreign Secretary David Lammy insisted on a two-state solution, saying, "We must see Palestinians live and prosper in their homelands." Lammy told reporters that rather than the U.S. redeveloping Gaza, the United Kingdom wants to collaborate with Arab countries on the territory's future. U.K. Prime Minister Keir [Starmer](#) said what's important now is sustaining the fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas.

Germany's foreign minister said expelling Palestinians would lead to new suffering, and France said it would violate international law.

### **Some Gazans left homeless would leave. Others refuse on principle**

In Gaza City, hundreds of thousands of people displaced during the war have returned to find the city largely destroyed — homes and businesses reduced to rubble, running water and electricity almost nonexistent.

Some [have returned](#) to Gaza's south, where humanitarian aid and services are more plentiful. But many are remaining among the debris in tents or in what's left of homes.



MIDDLE EAST CRISIS — EXPLAINED

#### **Palestinians in Gaza return to find their city in ruins after Israeli troops withdraw**

Bassam Muhammad Abdulraouf, 29, says he has no plans to leave Gaza.

"Even if there was a place that was a million times better than Gaza, and even if I could be sure that life there would be luxurious, I would still be ready to live among the rubble and in tents here," he says. "If they come with the army, with military force, I will still never leave."

Nehad Ghonaim, a surgeon at Kamal Adwan hospital, says he refused to leave the enclave's north during Israel's heavy bombardment and would also refuse Trump's proposal.



POLITICS

#### **Trump withdraws the U.S. from the United Nations Human Rights Council**

"This is my homeland and I have no intention to leave even if Trump provides me with the best of everything somewhere else," Ghonaim says, noting that he would not abandon the graves of his family killed during the war. He said his children were also killed and remain buried under rubble.

Yahia Barakat, 30, says he would leave if given the chance.

"My home is gone, my life is gone, my future is gone," he says. "If I travel and find a country that embraces me, provides me with safety and a good life, I will leave my country, leave my homeland, leave my home, because it will provide me with security and a good life."

*Anas Baba in Gaza City, Gaza, Nuha Musleh in Ramallah, West Bank, Itay Stern in Tel Aviv, Israel, Yanal Jabarin in Jerusalem, Abu Bakr Bashir and Lauren Frayer in London, Padma Rama in Washington, Eleanor Beardsley in Paris and Ahmed Abuhamda in Cairo contributed to this report.*

trump    gaza    middle east    donald trump    president trump    benjamin netanyahu    israel    palestinians    gaza strip



## READ & LISTEN

- [Home](#)
- [News](#)
- [Culture](#)
- [Music](#)
- [Podcasts & Shows](#)

## CONNECT

- [Newsletters](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Press](#)
- [Public Editor](#)
- [Corrections](#)
- [Contact & Help](#)

## ABOUT NPR

- [Overview](#)
- [Diversity](#)
- [NPR Network](#)
- [Accessibility](#)
- [Ethics](#)
- [Finances](#)

GET INVOLVED

**Support Public Radio**

**Sponsor NPR**

**NPR Careers**

**NPR Shop**

**NPR Events**

**NPR Extra**

---

[terms of use](#)

[privacy](#)

[your privacy choices](#)

[text only](#)