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Trump aides defend Gaza takeover proposal but walk back some elements

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At a White House briefing on Wednesday, Trump's press secretary Karoline Leavitt hailed his Gaza proposal as

Summary

Russia, China, Germany and Saudi Arabia condemn it

Critics warn of possibly violating international law

U.S. public opinion opposes new conflict zone entanglements

Netanyahu urges consideration of Trump's "remarkable" proposal

WASHINGTON/CAIRO, Feb 5 (Reuters) - President Donald Trump's top aides staunchly defended his push to transfer Palestinians out of Gaza and have the U.S. take over the war-ruined enclave, but they also backed away from elements of his proposal in the face of international condemnation.

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A longtime New York property developer, Trump drew rebukes on Wednesday from world powers Russia, China and Germany, which said it would foster "new suffering and new hatred." Regional heavyweight Saudi Arabia rejected the proposal outright.

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Wednesday that Trump's proposal was "remarkable" and urged that it be explored, even as he was not specific about what he believed Trump was offering.

Barely two weeks in the job, Trump shattered decades of U.S. policy on Tuesday with a vaguely worded announcement saying he envisioned transforming Gaza into the "Riviera of the Middle East" where international communities could coexist after nearly 16 months of Israeli bombardment devastated the coastal strip and killed more than 47,000 people, according to Palestinian tallies.

At a White House briefing on Wednesday, press secretary Karoline Leavitt hailed his Gaza proposal as historic "outside of the box" thinking but stressed that the president had not committed to putting "boots on the ground" in the territory. She declined, however, to rule out the use of U.S. troops there.

At the same time, Leavitt walked back Trump's earlier assertion that Gazans needed to be permanently resettled in neighboring countries, saying instead that they should be "temporarily relocated" for the rebuilding process.