

CSAG INFORMATION PAPER:

“The President’s Proposed Alternative for Gaza”

CSAG

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1. **Subject:** ***“The President’s Proposed Alternative for Gaza”***
2. **Purpose:** This paper presents an initial analysis of possible implications for USCENTCOM given President Trump’s recent statement about taking over Gaza.
3. **Introduction / Background:** President Trump met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Washington D.C. on February 4, 2025, to discuss the next stage of the ceasefire in Gaza. During the joint press conference that followed, President Trump said that the U.S. will take over Gaza.
4. **Facts:**
 - a. The meeting between President Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was the first bilateral head of state visit hosted in Washington, D.C. since the change of administration. In the press conference following the meetings, the President declared that they had discussed how the two countries can work together to eliminate Hamas and restore peace in the Middle East.
 - b. President Trump stated that Gaza has been a very problematic place for many years and that it is time to turn to countries in the region to build domains that can be occupied by the Palestinians now living in the Strip.
 - c. The President then followed up, saying that the U.S. will take over the Gaza Strip and own it, as well as be responsible for dismantling all the unexploded ordnance and other weapons on site. He also mentioned that the site was to be leveled to get rid of all the destroyed buildings to create economic development, housing, and job opportunities.
 - d. The statements were evidently motivated by the concern that if a new approach is not used, the cycle of violence will continue. The President said that he hoped the ceasefire could lay the foundation for an enduring peace.
 - e. Other issues addressed were the U.S. withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council as well as the end of all funding to UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), and the end of what was described as a de facto arms embargo on over one billion dollars in military assistance to Israel.
 - f. On Gaza, Prime Minister Netanyahu reiterated the Israeli war goals and expressed appreciation for President Trump’s ability to move away from conventional thinking, saying that fresh ideas will help Israel to achieve its goals. He also said that this unconventional thinking is what will help to reshape the Middle East and bring peace.¹

- g. Following the press conference, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and several states such as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia publicly rejected the idea of displacing the Palestinians in Gaza, whether temporary or permanent.²
- h. On February 6, the President returned to this issue, saying that Gaza would be turned over to the U.S. once the war ends but that no U.S. troops were needed.³
- i. The President did stick by the previous statements numerous times after February 4, and when asked on February 8 if the Palestinians would have the right to return, he said that it was not necessary since they would have better living conditions where they would be going.⁴
- j. During a press conference with the Irish Prime Minister on March 12, there was a discernable shift for the first time since February 6. The President was asked whether the two leaders had discussed the Gaza issue and expelling of Palestinians, to which he answered that “nobody is expelling any Palestinians.”⁵
- k. On March 14, reports did however surface that the U.S. and Israel have been investigating the possibilities to move Palestinians from Gaza to territories on the African continent. U.S. and Israeli officials have both confirmed that contacts have been made with Somalia and Somaliland, while only U.S. officials have confirmed contacting Sudan on the issue. The White House has declined to comment on the efforts.⁶
- l. Israeli officials have in recent statements reiterated that they are working with the U.S. to move forward with the President's vision for Gaza.⁷

5. Analysis/Assessment:

- a. It remains to be seen what policy will be formulated in support of the President's proposal for Gaza, as statements made by the administration are conflicting and have not yet resulted in any concrete action.
- b. Israeli strikes on Gaza resumed on March 18. Very little has been mentioned about the execution of the next phase of the ceasefire, except the Israeli and U.S. proposition to return to and extend the first phase.
- c. The statement by the President suggests an active U.S. support to the Israeli “Generals’ Plan” mentioned in the CSAG Strategy Paper ‘Ceasefire Part 2 – Regional Escalation’.⁸
- d. It is however possible that the statements are a part of a negotiation tactic to encourage regional partners to find another solution for the Palestinians. Indeed, Secretary of State Rubio stated, “if you don’t like the President’s plan, then come up with a better plan.”⁹
- e. Regardless of the intention of the statements, they did have an effect almost immediately as Egypt and the Arab League states hastily came up with a counter proposal. Given that Israel and the U.S. almost immediately rejected that plan, together with the outreach to the African countries, there is an indication that there is a real interest to pursue the President’s proposal.¹⁰
- f. The statements suggesting displacement have the potential to cause a rift in the new administration’s relationship with partners in the region, if the administration moves forward with the idea. This puts at risk access, basing, and overflight (ABO) for CENTCOM, limiting operational freedom.
- g. Further, the positions of many European and other countries, as well as supranational organizations, stand in stark contrast with those of the U.S. administration.¹¹ In combination with the new

administration's revised stance on how to handle the war in Ukraine, the Gaza proposal may contribute to putting further pressure on the transatlantic relationship.

- h. A decline in good diplomatic relations with the countries in CENTCOM AOR and other partners/allies could have a negative effect on joint military efforts in the region and strategic competition.
- i. It is very unlikely the Palestinians would willingly leave Gaza. There is a clear risk that a takeover of Gaza, by force or not, would fuel hatred against the U.S. among the displaced, as well as increase prospects for further radicalization both inside and outside of the Palestinian community. This would likely increase threats to security in the region and to the U.S. Homeland.
- j. A U.S. takeover of Gaza would likely be interpreted by many as a violation of international law, which prohibits the use military force to displace ethnic groups. Further, it is by no means clear what legal right Israel has to "turn over" the territory to the U.S.
- k. It is also possible that the statements are a part of a larger context where recognizing Israeli sovereignty of the West Bank might be an option.
- l. Meanwhile, Israel is amplifying the President's stated vision for Gaza, which may drive a rift between regional partners and the U.S.

6. Conclusion/Possible Implications for USCENTCOM:

- a. If the plans to implement the sentiment were to materialize, it is likely that force would have to be used to remove the civilian Palestinians from Gaza, as well as eradicating the remnants of Hamas attempting to defend against this action. For reconstruction to happen and for the solidifying of Hamas' ousting, the ground would have to be held over a prolonged period, which would be a costly operation for the U.S. both in terms of materiel and personnel.
- b. The assumption of U.S. authority over Gaza, however temporary, would have an impact on all CENTCOMs lines of efforts, even if, as stated by the President, the U.S. ownership of the Strip would contribute to some stability in the region.
- c. The consequences of the statements could affect USCENTCOM's ability to strengthen regional security. Many countries have already rejected the suggestion, which could lead to division and mistrust between the U.S. and partners/allies if not carefully handled. These relationships are vital to deal with the multitude of contemporary security challenges in the region.

Sources:

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³ Chantal Da Silva, "Trump defends Gaza proposal, says territory would be 'turned over' to U.S. by Israel," *NBC News*, February 6, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/trump-defends-gaza-plans-israel-turned-over-rcna190955> (accessed February 6, 2025).

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⁵ Jacob Magid, "Trump says 'nobody is expelling any Palestinians', in an apparent softening of Gaza plan," *The Times of Israel*, March 13, 2025, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/trump-says-nobodys-expelling-any-palestinians-in-apparent-softening-of-gaza-plan/> (accessed March 19, 2025).

⁶ Josef Federman, Matthew Lee, and Samy Magdy, "AP Exclusive: US and Israel look to Africa for moving Palestinians uprooted from Gaza," *Associated Press*, March 14, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-gaza-trump-somaliland-sudan-somalia-575e03aaa0c487bae2fbadfddef8f5ca3> (accessed March 19, 2025).

⁷ Amichai Stein, "US still searching for state to accept Palestinians from Gaza, Israeli cabinet told," *The Jerusalem Post*, March 23, 2025, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/politics-and-diplomacy/article-847297> (accessed March 27, 2025); Tiffany Wertheimer, "Israel order army to 'seize additional territories' in Gaza," *BBC News*, March 21, 2025, <https://bbc.com/news/articles/clvj5vg4wnwo> (accessed March 27, 2025).

⁸ CSAG, "Ceasefire Part 2 – Regional Escalation," January 13, 2025, <https://nesa-center.org/csag-strategy-paper-ceasefire-part-2-regional-escalation/> (accessed February 26, 2025).

⁹ Iain Marlow, "Rubio Says Arabs Should Offer Alternative To Trump's Gaza Plan," *Bloomberg News*, February 14, 2025, <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/bloomberg-government-news/rubio-says-arabs-should-offer-alternative-to-trumps-gaza-plan?context=search&index=3> (accessed March 7, 2025).

¹⁰ David Gritten, "US and Israel reject Arab alternative to Trump's Gaza plan," *BBC News*, March 5, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn7vd4pnxx3o> (accessed March 7, 2025).

¹¹ *Reuters*, "Global reaction to Trump's Gaza takeover proposal," February 5, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/trumps-call-us-take-over-gaza-draws-criticism-2025-02-05/> (accessed February 18, 2025).