An American and an Arab Plan for the Gaza Strip

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On 4 February 2025, President Donald Trump announced in Washington, D.C. his proposal to transform Gaza into the "Riviera of the Middle East," a plan that would displace millions of Palestinians. One month later, Arab leaders convened in Cairo, where the Egyptian government put forward an alternative plan aimed at reconstructing Gaza while ensuring Palestinians remain on their land. What do these two plans entail, and what do they mean for the future of Palestine and its citizens?

Trump's Proposal for Gaza

On 4 February 2025, during a press conference at the White House with Benjamin Netanyahu, Trump proposed a new plan for Gaza. He stressed the need for a new approach to the future of Gaza. Trump stated that he wanted a plan that focused more on "how Palestinians get to a better life" through various measures such as education, job opportunities, and economic growth. The proposal therefore included the relocation of 2.3 million Palestinians to neighbouring countries such as Egypt and Jordan to provide them with safer and more stable living conditions. This population transfer would allow the United States to completely rebuild Gaza by clearing undamaged areas, removing remnants of explosions, and developing new infrastructure to create jobs and housing. Trump envisioned turning this plan into a real estate opportunity by turning Gaza into a luxury resort, calling it 'the Riviera of the Middle East'. The US president insisted that this would be a long-term redevelopment plan.

Since that statement, the White House administration has sent mixed signals about the proposal. On the one hand, press secretary Karoline Leavitt claimed that the Palestinian expulsion would be temporary and would not involve American troops or taxpayers' money. On the other hand, on 10 February, Trump contradicted his administration by declaring that the Palestinians would not return to Gaza. He insisted that they would find better housing and opportunities in neighbouring countries, which he argued was a better permanent place for them. Trump also stated that he would not support a Palestinian-led government in Gaza. Unlike the Arab League plan, his proposal was not documented, but consisted of several statements by the US president and his administration. On 21 February, for example, Trump claimed on Fox News that this proposal was not being imposed on the Palestinians, but that he sincerely recommended it. He argued that it would prevent further conflict and facilitate peace in the region.

Trump's proposal provoked mixed reactions from different sides. Palestinians living in Gaza strongly rejected the idea, asserting their right to remain in their homeland, as did Hamas, which called it "ridiculous and absurd". Similar reactions came from neighbouring countries such as Egypt and Jordan. Indeed, Jordan's King Abdullah II rejected the plan, prioritising the reconstruction of Gaza and support for its people. Saudi Arabia said the displacement of Gazans was impossible and non-negotiable. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, on the other hand, saw Trump's ideas as innovative and beneficial to his country's security.

These negative reactions were in line with the many criticisms that experts had leveled at the proposal. It faced significant legal and diplomatic challenges. Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, dismissed President Donald Trump's proposal as "utter nonsense". She insisted that the forced displacement of Palestinians is an international crime. Indeed,

scholars argued that Palestinians have a deep attachment to Gaza. They perceived Trump's proposal as a second "Nakba" (the Arabic word for catastrophe), similar to the expulsion in 1948 with the creation of the state of Israel. To make matters worse, key regional players such as Egypt and Jordan have rejected the idea. So the Palestinians cannot be resettled in neighbouring countries unless they accept it.

The Arab-led proposal for the Gaza Strip

"The Arab stance is to reject any displacement, whether it is voluntary or forced." Those were the words uttered by the secretary general of the Arab League, Ahmed Abdul Gheit, in Cairo on 4 March 2025. Following Trump's controversial plan to make Gaza the "Riviera of the Middle East," regional leaders gathered in Egypt's capital to discuss an Arab-led initiative for the future of Gaza. The counterproposal, put forward by the Egyptian government, outlines a 91-page reconstruction plan for a debris-ridden Gaza. The war in Gaza has destroyed houses, schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure, leaving in its wake roughly 23 million tons of rubble, according to the United Nations (UN). Egypt's ambitious proposal for reconstructing Gaza was endorsed by attendees at the summit, such as the emir of Qatar, the vice president of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the foreign minister of Saudi Arabia (KSA), and the UN Secretary-General, Antonios Guterres. It is estimated that the reconstruction will total $53 billion and will take up to five years to complete.

Over the course of those five years, the plan is divided into three phases: an initial six-month early recovery period, followed by a reconstruction phase, and finally, a governance phase. The interim period would see Gaza cleared of its 23 million tons of debris, de-mined, and its citizens provided with temporary housing. Roughly 200,000 units will be temporarily provided, each accommodating up to six people, and 60,000 buildings will be restored. Phase two will see 400,000 more houses built, critical infrastructure such as water and electricity restored, and the rebuilding of a fishing port, commercial port, and international airport. Governance is the last phase and perhaps the most vague stage of this five-year plan. The first and second phases would be coordinated by an administrative committee of Palestinian technocrats who would replace the current Hamas-led government for an indefinite time. The committee would be backed by a fund from donor countries and responsible for overseeing the reconstruction of Gaza and the provision of humanitarian aid. However, much remains unclear as to who will govern the territory after the committee's departure.

The plan envisions the return of the Palestinian authority but there is no mention of how Hamas will be removed from Gaza or what measures will be taken if this militant group refuses to leave. On the security front, there is reference to a potential UN Security Council peacekeeping mission, called upon by Egypt and Jordan, that would supervise the governing body

until reconstruction was finished. However, Hamas has said it "rejects...the presence of any foreign forces on the land of the Gaza Strip." These two countries also proposed a longer term solution to train a local force of police officers as Gaza's security apparatus. With no clear and definite plans on Gaza's governance, the implementation of Egypt's proposal remains up in the air. Crucial to this five-year plan and also not decided upon is who will finance the costs. Although there are talks of an international conference next month to raise the necessary funds for this reconstruction project, it is currently uncertain who will foot this $53 billion bill. The oil-rich Gulf states are the obvious candidates, but no nation is prepared to commit billions to rebuilding Gaza if its integrity remains under threat, particularly with Israel continuing to bomb the territory. Indeed, despite the ceasefire deal brokered between Hamas and Israel established in January of this year, Israeli aircraft attacked Gaza on 18 March, breaking the ceasefire agreements. In such an unstable environment, it is not clear when Egypt's reconstruction plan would start.

Although many questions remain up in the air, Egypt's proposal does make clear one thing: Palestinians will not be displaced from their territory. Egypt's President, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, opened the summit by ensuring that Egypt's proposal will mean Palestinians can "remain on their land." The Arab-backed plan firmly rejects Trump's plans to displace 2.3 million Palestinians. For Arab states such as Egypt and Jordan, the displacement of Palestinians is not only an injustice, but also poses a security threat to their countries. Therefore, the plan proposed in Cairo on 4 March has firmly stated that the reconstruction of Gaza would be carried out with the future of Palestine and citizens in it.

The two proposals for Gaza—Trump's vision of transforming it into a luxury resort and Egypt's reconstruction plan—offer different plans for the future of the Palestinian territory. Trump's plan to transform Gaza into the "Riviera of the Middle East," displacing 2.3 million Palestinians, has been widely condemned by Arab nations and human rights organisations as a violation of international law. In contrast, the Egyptian-led proposal prioritises the rebuilding of critical infrastructure in Gaza while ensuring Palestinians stay on their land, though uncertainties remain regarding governance and funding.