

Criticizing Trump Isn't Enough. Arab Leaders Need a Counterproposal

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Moving forward with an alternative Gaza plan may not be the president's first choice, but he could at least take credit for getting Arab states to take action.

U.S. President Donald Trump's background in real estate and construction has a lot to do with his [shock announcement](#) (<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/05/us/politics/trump-gaza-netanyahu-takeover.html>) on Tuesday. His call for the relocation of Palestinians from Gaza is not driven by concern for Palestinian attachment to the land and a fear of expulsion from it, but by his perception of a straightforward problem of reconstruction in an environment where infrastructure has been largely destroyed and vast numbers of unexploded bombs litter a devastated landscape.

For him, reconstruction is not possible so long as Gaza is densely populated. His answer: Palestinians leave Gaza and are absorbed in Egypt, Jordan, and elsewhere in the region.

For Trump, it is common sense. For Palestinians and Arabs, it is a profound threat to the Palestinian national cause because they perceive it to mean that Palestinians are again being forced to leave a part of their homeland. (Something that is the dream of the extreme right in Israel, which has long believed the Palestinians can simply be wished away.)

Arab leaders understand that supporting what will be portrayed in the Middle East as a betrayal of Palestinian national rights could unleash great popular anger against them—potentially destabilizing their regimes and allowing Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas to recapture credibility by being prepared to resist such a betrayal. That explains the [quick rejection](#) (<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/violation-of-international-law-arab-countries-decry-trump-s-proposal-to-take-over-gaza-strip/3473226>) of the Trump proposal by the Egyptian, Jordanian, Saudi, Emirati, and Qatari governments—the very countries that Trump wants to host roughly 2 million Palestinians.

Their rejection may be understandable, but if they want to dissuade Trump, they cannot just come with calls for a two-state solution, which is little more than a slogan at this point. Just as the Arabs coordinated their public rejection of Trump's plan for Gaza, they should coordinate a concrete counterproposal for what comes next in Gaza that goes beyond platitudes.

Jordanian King Abdullah II and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi separately plan to meet with Trump later this month; they need to be able to present a practical plan—based on agreement with the Saudis, Emiratis, and Qataris—that lays out how the rebuilding of Gaza can proceed based on a formula of “reconstruction for demilitarization.”

The plan must also address how an interim administration in Gaza could work and who will assume responsibility for governance, law and order, prevention of smuggling, and day-to-day management. It cannot be Hamas, or there will be no reconstruction, and at least initially, the Palestinian Authority is too weak, too dysfunctional, and too corrupt to play anything but a supportive role. Providing Trump with an alternative may not be his first choice, but he could take credit for getting Arab states to adopt a real approach to the day after in Gaza.

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