

# When the Riviera Meets the Sumud: Why Palestinian Realities Don't Mesh with Trump's Gaza Plan

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Brief Analysis

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**Trump's vision to transform Gaza is based on economic and utilitarian considerations, but it fails to take into account the Palestinian connection to the land, which remains a central component of Palestinian national identity.**

**P**resident Trump's vision for rehabilitating the Gaza Strip has met resistance from the international community, from all Middle East states except Israel, and from the Palestinians. According to his vision, the two million Palestinians living in the strip would relocate to other countries—namely neighboring Egypt and Jordan, though media reports have also noted more distant destinations such as Morocco, Somaliland, and Puntland. “I hope we can do something where they wouldn't want to go back,” **he stated (<https://apnews.com/article/trump-rubio-leavitt-gaza-permanent-temporary-funding-53d3c737d24dd8ea290e0e7962546575>)** on February 4, while members of his administration described the evacuation of Palestinians as a “temporary” or “interim” arrangement. The United States would then oversee the rehabilitation project, other countries would finance it, and Gaza would supposedly be transformed into a “Riviera of the Middle East” where people from around the world could settle, while the Palestinians “would have already been resettled in far safer and more beautiful communities.”

In response, both the Palestinian Authority and Hamas—despite their bitter differences on other issues—declared they would not accept any arrangement that contravenes the Palestinian “right of return,” reflecting their longstanding communal ethos of *sumud* (steadfastness). PA president Mahmoud Abbas called the plan a “serious violation of international law” and swiftly coordinated a unified stance with Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Hamas asserted that it would not allow “ethnic cleansing” and forced displacement of Palestinians from Gaza, with senior member Izzat al-Rishq stating, “The plan reflects ignorance and a lack of understanding of Palestine and the region. Gaza is not a piece of land for sale or purchase. It is an inseparable part of the occupied Palestinian territories.”

Similarly, the Palestinian public received Trump's announcement with surprise, anger, and despair. The overwhelming majority of commentators rejected the proposal outright, viewing it as one more example of Israel's wartime intention to orchestrate another *nakba* (disaster), the term used to describe the Palestinian displacements that occurred during Israel's founding. One media quote from a young Gazan woman captures the public sentiment there: "We are not an abandoned building that someone can claim ownership of. We are a people. We belong to this land." Others sarcastically questioned why Trump was not offering the United States as a destination for Palestinian immigration. Palestinian social media users have likewise expressed resentment toward what they see as a U.S.-Israeli plan to erase their national identity. Many commentators called their current situation a low point for the Palestinian national movement, which they characterized as weak, divided, and dependent on external actors to thwart the plan. They also noted that the movement has failed to mobilize widespread popular resistance to the plan. Yet there were isolated voices among Palestinians who welcomed Trump's idea, seeing it as a potential path to a better future for themselves and their children.

Trump's proposal—which is more a set of general principles than a detailed plan—reflects his fundamental approach to political affairs. As a businessman, he sees people primarily as economic beings who prioritize tangible personal gains—such as prosperity, from which they derive dignity—over abstract collective goals like national independence and cultural or religious identity. This perspective is also evident in his proposals regarding Greenland, Canada, and the Panama Canal, replacing the political concept of "sovereignty" with the economic term "ownership" and treating territory as real estate.

From this point of view, offering Palestinians material benefits to encourage them to abandon their national narrative is an attempt to advance "economic peace." However, this approach can succeed only between sovereign states that are not being asked to relinquish core elements of their identity in exchange for economic gains. One example of such a case is the Abraham Accords, the pinnacle of Trump's foreign policy during his previous presidency.

## Past Emigration Policies

The idea of resolving the conflict by encouraging Palestinian emigration from Gaza is not new. In fact, it was a prominent part of Israeli policy in the years following the 1967 occupation, and signs of such an approach emerged as early as Israel's 1956-57 occupation. In recent years, right-wing Israeli politicians have made similar proposals both before the current war and especially in its aftermath. Research by Omri Shafer Raviv, who examined policy toward Palestinians after the Six Day War, [revealed](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00263206.2020.1864335) (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00263206.2020.1864335>) that Israel sought to promote initiatives to encourage their migration (effectively transfer) to destinations outside Israeli-controlled territories, primarily Latin America and the Arab Gulf states. Israel has also considered resettling Gazans in areas under its control like the West Bank and, in the past, Sinai.

Initially, such policies aimed to encourage the departure of Gaza's entire population, or at least a significant part of it. However, the failure of these efforts, along with internal policy debates (e.g., many asked whether reducing Gaza's population was worth increasing the West Bank Palestinian population), caused Israel to change its focus and encourage the emigration of specific segments of the Gaza population. In particular, this included individuals who were radical or otherwise deemed to be security threats, such as educated young men. Israel pursued this outcome mainly by limiting opportunities for quality employment in Gaza.

In practice, the policies designed to encourage Palestinian emigration resulted in the departure of only a small number of people. Yet broader policy measures such as open borders had a greater effect—by 1987, more than 94,000 Gazans (nearly a quarter of the Strip's 1967 population) had left through "[quiet and spontaneous](https://hazmanhazeh.org.il/emigration_encouragement/)" emigration. More recently, various international

organizations have reported that around 250,000-350,000 Palestinians left Gaza between the Hamas takeover in 2007 and October 2023. Another 115,000-135,000 individuals left between the October 7 attack and the closure of the Rafah crossing in May 2024. According to a [September 2023 survey \(https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/AB8-Palestine-Report-4-English.pdf\)](https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/AB8-Palestine-Report-4-English.pdf) by the Arab Barometer, about one-third of Gaza's residents and one-fifth of West Bank residents were considering emigration for economic, political, security, or governance-related reasons. In recent years, Turkey has been the primary destination for Palestinians leaving Gaza, though most intended to continue on to other locations, particularly Europe, Canada, the United States, and Qatar.

## Arab Concerns

For the Arab states, two crucial elements are absent from Trump's plan: keeping at least some Palestinians in Gaza to show that rehabilitation is possible even while residents remain, and linking the process to a political horizon, even if distant, that leads to a Palestinian state. These states will attempt to show their willingness to actively contribute through financial aid, equipment, advisors, engineering plans, and even a joint Arab security or civilian force in Gaza—something they have not done so far. Their hope is that this will cause Trump to abandon his plan, especially since the administration has stated it is open to better alternatives.

Meanwhile, Qatar and Turkey are working to integrate Hamas into the Palestinian Liberation Organization's institutions. However, given the lack of direct dialogue between Fatah (the PLO's leading party) and Hamas, they are unlikely to reach a detailed agreement. Instead, they may propose a general framework, such as a civilian committee subordinate to the PLO's institutions, hoping that the Trump administration will deem this sufficient, at least initially.

## Conclusion

Trump's vision of Palestinian emigration from Gaza and the area's transformation into a "Riviera" is based on economic-utilitarian logic. Some Palestinians may emigrate if conditions are favorable—for example, if they have the means to leave, and if welcoming and developed destinations are available. However, mass emigration as part of an official political plan—especially one that precludes their return—remains unlikely. Ultimately, the ethos of *sumud* remains a central component of Palestinian national identity. Without it, the Palestinian national movement would lose its *raison d'être*.

Notably, Trump's vision is a product of the vacuum created by the lack of a clear, feasible Israeli plan for the "day after" in Gaza. If Israel succeeds in formulating such a plan, it will be better able to shape the situation "between the river and the sea," while paving the way for progress in relations with Arab states.

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