

Trump Holds the Levers to Move Gaza Toward Peace

by [Dennis Ross \(/experts/dennis-ross\)](/experts/dennis-ross)

Sep 28, 2025

Also published in *Washington Post*

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Dennis Ross \(/experts/dennis-ross\)](/experts/dennis-ross)

Dennis Ross, a former special assistant to President Barack Obama, is the counselor and William Davidson Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute.



Articles & Testimony

The 21-point U.S. plan offers an alternative to Hamas governance, but the president will have to ensure an interim administration meets its disarmament commitments—and support Israeli responses if Hamas reemerges.

If President Donald Trump truly wants to produce a new day in Gaza—and keep alive his hopes for a Nobel Peace Prize—he will have to use the leverage he has with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu and Trump [are scheduled to meet Monday \(https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/09/26/un-general-assembly-israel-netanyahu-speech/9c4f21d2-9a8e-11f0-8ce3-5abc3053a693_story.html\)](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/09/26/un-general-assembly-israel-netanyahu-speech/9c4f21d2-9a8e-11f0-8ce3-5abc3053a693_story.html). For all the bravado of Netanyahu's [speech to the United Nations \(https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/09/26/israel-netanyahu-un-speech-gaza/\)](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/09/26/israel-netanyahu-un-speech-gaza/) on Friday, he has to feel uneasy about Trump's [categorical opposition \(https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/09/25/trump-israel-west-bank/\)](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/09/25/trump-israel-west-bank/) to Israeli annexation of the West Bank and advancement of a 21-point plan for ending the brutal Gaza war. Netanyahu is under pressure from his governing coalition to annex at least parts of the West Bank as a response to the [recognition of a Palestinian state \(https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/30/world/middleeast/palestinian-state-recognition-maps.html\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/30/world/middleeast/palestinian-state-recognition-maps.html) by Britain, France, Canada and others.

Maybe all of this is choreography by the two leaders to enable Netanyahu to tell his coalition that he simply can't defy Trump on annexation, given all the president has done for Israel—especially the U.S. strikes against Iranian nuclear infrastructure. It certainly wouldn't be the first time Bibi has used the insistence of a U.S. president to evade pressure from his base. But will that calculus apply to Gaza, too?

In [his meeting Tuesday \(https://www.politico.com/news/2025/09/24/trump-west-bank-annex-00578051\)](https://www.politico.com/news/2025/09/24/trump-west-bank-annex-00578051) with Arab and Muslim leaders, Trump said he wants the fighting to end and has a plan for governance of the enclave afterward. His plan is largely based on one developed by [former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Jared Kushner \(https://www.timesofisrael.com/revealed-tony-blairs-us-backed-proposal-for-ending-the-gaza-war-\)](https://www.timesofisrael.com/revealed-tony-blairs-us-backed-proposal-for-ending-the-gaza-war-)

and-replacing-hamas/), the architect of the Abraham Accords during Trump's first term. The governance framework includes an interim administration with a council or board of directors overseeing ministries run by international and regional experts and Palestinian technocrats, including from the Palestinian Authority. The ministries would address day-to-day needs—areas such as health, water, electricity, humanitarian aid, finance and recovery—as well as law and order. The plan would also set the stage for the rebuilding of Gaza based on a formula of reconstruction in exchange for demilitarization.

In short, the plan would create an alternative to Hamas, which on one level should appeal to Netanyahu. After all, there must be an alternative to Hamas or Israel cannot leave Gaza. While some of Netanyahu's ministers want to resettle the enclave, Netanyahu has continuously said that he does not.

But the prime minister has explicitly said there will never be a Palestinian state, and the plan clearly opens up that possibility. Moreover, since Hamas's Oct. 7, 2023, mass terrorist attack on Israel, Netanyahu has clearly wanted to be able to declare that Israel achieved "total victory" over the group, meaning its elimination. The Trump plan cannot deliver that; indeed, no plan can.

For Hamas, surrendering to Israel would mean betraying its ideology of resistance and martyrdom. (Its leaders have been quite willing to treat the public in Gaza as martyrs, without, of course, ever asking whether that was acceptable to them.) Still, Hamas might see acquiescing to an Arab-backed plan that left it out of power as something other than defeat, especially because it could claim that it won the release of thousands of Palestinian prisoners. Hamas's leaders might calculate that, over time, they could regroup under an international or regional administration in Gaza.

That is a legitimate Netanyahu fear. Indeed, the prime minister is likely to argue that Israel cannot withdraw until Hamas is fully disarmed, and the plan is based on disarmament over time. To be sure, disarmament won't just happen of its own accord; it will require sustained effort. And Hamas leaders continue to declare that they will not disarm. But ultimately, there simply will be no reconstruction of Gaza without it. That is not an argument; that is a fact, because no one will invest in Gaza if Hamas retains the means to recover and start another war.

Could Hamas, which has lost most of its military infrastructure, resist an Arab-led administration that promises to end the suffering in Gaza? Though Netanyahu and those around him believe that only Israel has the will to fight Hamas, they tend to overlook that their own approach to the war failed the fundamental test of dealing with a guerrilla conflict: to protect the population. Hamas retains the power to intimidate the population because the IDF's mission has not been to protect them.

An Arab force may not come in with the mandate to kill Hamas members, but it *will* come in with a mission of protecting the population. That could make all the difference: Freed from the fear and seeing the potential for a genuine alternative, we are likely to see popular resistance to Hamas, which will dramatically raise the cost to the group of blocking implementation of the plan. (**<https://institute.global/insights/geopolitics-and-security/tbi-comment-zogby-research-services-Palestinian-polling-May-2025>**) by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change demonstrate how the bulk of the Gazan population has turned against Hamas, though they have been largely powerless to resist it, especially when preoccupied with simple survival.)

That said, there needs to be a genuine commitment by the interim administration, largely led by key Arab states, to implement disarmament. A wink and a nod won't cut it. There must be a similar commitment, with a real mechanism, to ensure an end to the smuggling that Hamas used to build its military and tunnel infrastructure.

Trump will remain the key player. He will have to hold the interim administration's feet to the fire to make sure the disarmament commitments are actually carried out—and also be prepared to support Israeli responses if Hamas begins to reemerge. But first, he will have to insist that the Netanyahu government end the war and withdraw.

That will take more than Monday's meeting. Remember, Netanyahu is a master at agreeing and then introducing all

sorts of issues to delay or water down implementation. But if Trump uses his leverage to bring Bibi (and the Arabs) along and produces on the possibilities in the plan on the table, he might yet get the Nobel Peace Prize that he covets.

Dennis Ross is the Davidson Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute and a former senior official in the Reagan, Bush, Clinton, and Obama administrations. This article was originally published on the Washington Post website (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2025/09/28/trump-netanyahu-israel-gaza-peace-plan/>). ❖

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Assessing Israel-U.S. Alignment on the Gaza Framework](#)

Sep 29, 2025

◆
David Makovsky

(/policy-analysis/assessing-israel-us-alignment-gaza-framework)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[Thank You, President Trump, for Vetoing Israeli Annexation in the West Bank](#)

Sep 27, 2025

◆
Robert Satloff

(/policy-analysis/thank-you-president-trump-vetoing-israeli-annexation-west-bank)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Israel Is Pushing Arab Peace Partners to Their Limits](#)

Sep 25, 2025

◆
David Schenker

(/policy-analysis/israel-pushing-arab-peace-partners-their-limits)

TOPICS

Arab-Israeli Relations (/policy-analysis/arab-israeli-relations)

Military & Security (/policy-analysis/military-security)

Peace Process (/policy-analysis/peace-process)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Israel (/policy-analysis/israel)

Palestinians (/policy-analysis/palestinians)