

# The Real Trump Factor in the Gaza Deal

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**The price of today's breakthrough may be tomorrow's turbulence, as the president and his advisors press their thumbs on the scales of Israel's electoral and legal processes.**

**P**raise for President Trump's diplomacy in brokering a cease-fire in Gaza has mostly focused on how he persuaded Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel to accept a deal. Many assume that Trump threatened to withdraw U.S. support from Israel, or otherwise pressured the Israeli leader into capitulating.

But there is a more convincing explanation for Mr. Trump's success. Far from merely menacing Mr. Netanyahu with consequences, the American president's key intervention was to give a political lifeline to the deeply unpopular Israeli leader. The secret of Mr. Trump's success with Mr. Netanyahu was offering carrots on domestic politics—not sticks on foreign policy.

There were, of course, important external factors that laid the groundwork for the deal. Both Israel and Hamas had finally concluded that continuing the war was a losing proposition. For Hamas, Israel's operations over the past year have been devastating. The group's ability to maneuver and resupply itself is hobbled; its cash flow has been severed; and its top leaders have been eliminated. Outside Gaza, Hamas' supporters in the Axis of Resistance have also been degraded by Israel's strikes across Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iran itself. Hamas found itself isolated in the region and increasingly unpopular in Gaza.

For Israel, the war had reached a tipping point. Its operational gains no longer outweighed the [collapse of Israel's international standing \(https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/06/03/most-people-across-24-surveyed-countries-have-negative-views-of-israel-and-netanyahu/#:~:text=Most%20people%20across%2024%20surveyed,How%20we%20did%20this\)](https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/06/03/most-people-across-24-surveyed-countries-have-negative-views-of-israel-and-netanyahu/#:~:text=Most%20people%20across%2024%20surveyed,How%20we%20did%20this), the erosion of bipartisan American support (<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2025/10/03/how-americans-view-the->

**israel-hamas-conflict-2-years-into-the-war/)** over civilian casualties in Gaza or the **strain on Israel's war-weary military (https://www.timesofisrael.com/tens-of-thousands-of-reservists-drafted-ahead-of-gaza-city-takeover-but-turnout-down/)**. The new phase of the war that Mr. Netanyahu announced over the summer—in which Israel aimed to hold most of the Gaza Strip and once again clear northern Gaza of Hamas—committed the Israel Defense Forces to an unsustainable drain on munitions and manpower.

Israel's broad-daylight strike against Hamas political leaders in Doha, Qatar, also created an opening. Two years of rising fury in the Muslim world over the agony in Gaza were already putting stress on leaders across the Middle East. Many privately supported dismantling Hamas but would not risk potential domestic backlash by appearing to back Israel's military campaign. But Israel's Doha strike brought the Gaza war to them—and threatened to upend their unwritten contracts between government and governed. The unhappy Gulf leaders had Mr. Trump's ear, and they used it.

This brings us to the role of Mr. Trump himself, whose critical contribution was less about pressuring Mr. Netanyahu than diving deep into his political quagmire. President Biden never wavered in his support for Israel's campaign to dismantle Hamas after the horrors of Oct. 7. But Mr. Biden's team also applied pressure—including **withholding certain munitions (https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-shipment-of-heavy-bombs-held-up-by-biden-administration-arrives-in-israel/)** and **publicly calling out likely Israeli war crimes (https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/u-s-says-israels-use-of-u-s-arms-likely-violated-international-law-but-evidence-is-incomplete)**—to push Israel to protect civilians and increase humanitarian aid. When Mr. Trump returned to office, he ended any daylight with Mr. Netanyahu on Gaza. Mr. Trump did not object when Israel halted all humanitarian aid to Gaza in March. He did not threaten to withhold U.S. support, despite alarming indicators of famine in the Gaza Strip and rising reports of civilian casualties.

Many analysts assumed Mr. Netanyahu, constrained by his far-right coalition, would not accept any end to the war without a complete Hamas surrender. Any compromise in which Hamas could reassert itself could have triggered early elections in Israel, costing Mr. Netanyahu the premiership and exposing him to his ongoing trials for corruption.

Mr. Trump flipped the script. Mr. Trump lavished praise on his counterpart, extending him the political protection of Trump's overwhelming popularity in Israel. In return, Mr. Netanyahu agreed to Trump's proposal to free the hostages and let Hamas survive, for now.

An early sign of this overt interference in Israeli domestic politics came in June, when Mr. Trump posted on Truth Social about the corruption charges Mr. Netanyahu is facing, calling it a "POLITICAL WITCH HUNT" and for his trial to be canceled. Weeks later, in a highly unusual move, the **U.S. ambassador to Israel, Mike Huckabee (https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/16/world/middleeast/mike-huckabee-ambassador-netanyahu-trial-israel.html)**, attended one of Mr. Netanyahu's corruption trials.

After last week's breakthrough, Mr. Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff and the president's son-in-law Jared Kushner pointedly **flanked Mr. Netanyahu in a meeting (https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-869883)** with Israel's cabinet, directly engaging in Israel's internal debate on approving the cease-fire deal. Mr. Witkoff and Mr. Kushner went on to laud Mr. Netanyahu at a rally in Tel Aviv's now-famous "hostages square," **despite boos from the crowd (https://www.timesofisrael.com/tel-aviv-crowd-boos-netanyahus-name-during-witkoff-speech-cheers-trump/)**. Finally, and most jarringly, Mr. Trump paused during his triumphal speech to the Israeli Knesset on Monday to urge Israel's president, Isaac Herzog, to **pardon (https://www.politico.eu/article/more-than-cigars-and-champagne-donald-trump-benjamin-netanyahu-israel/)** the prime minister for charges of corruption in ongoing trials.

That is the real Trump factor in the Gaza deal: pressing the presidential thumb on the scales in Israel's electoral and legal processes.

The price of today's breakthrough will be tomorrow's turbulence. To sustain Arab and Muslim leaders' buy-in on the cease-fire, Israel will need to exercise restraint when faced with Hamas's inevitable resistance to disarm. Hamas challenged the cease-fire within 48 hours, firing close enough to the Israeli withdrawal line that the U.S. military **issued a terse warning (<https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/STATEMENTS/Statements-View/Article/4323657/oct-15-2025-statement-from-adm-brad-cooper-centcom-commander/>)** to the terrorist group.

This grim reality in Gaza will be increasingly hard for Mr. Netanyahu during the coming campaign season, as he continues to be attacked for accepting a deal that leaves Hamas in place. Mr. Trump could be dragged even deeper into Israeli politics as he seeks to protect Mr. Netanyahu from his cabinet's far-right flank and prevent the fragile cease-fire from collapsing.

All of this makes for an uneasy peace. Mr. Trump is tying the United States to a deeply unpopular leader who, so far, has resisted any accountability for his role in the catastrophe of Oct. 7 and its aftermath. Mr. Netanyahu's political survival now appears to depend on Mr. Trump personally, despite increasing **skepticism on the American right and left (<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2025/09/29/us-israel-relations-youth-00578109>)** about U.S. support for Israel. As both countries head into fiercely contested and pivotal legislative elections next year, Mr. Trump may soon find that playing someone else's politics is risky business.

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