

US news

# Trump's Gaza proposal rejected by allies and condemned as ethnic cleansing plan

Thursday 30 January 2025, by [GRAHAM-HARRISON Emma](#) (Date first published: 26 January 2025).

## US president has suggested Palestinians should leave Gaza for neighbouring countries to 'just clean out' whole strip

*Palestinians and Jordanians reject Donald Trump's call to displace Palestinians in Gaza - video*

Donald Trump's proposal that large numbers of Palestinians should leave [Gaza](#) to "just clean out" the whole strip has been rejected by US allies in the region and attacked as dangerous, illegal and unworkable by lawyers and activists.

The US president said he would like hundreds of thousands of people to move to neighbouring countries, either "temporarily or could be long-term". Destinations could include Jordan, which already hosts more than 2.7 million Palestinian refugees, and Egypt, he added.

"I'd rather get involved with some of the Arab nations and build housing at a different location where they can maybe live in peace for a change," Trump told reporters on Air Force One. "You're talking about probably a million and a half people, and we just clean out that whole thing and say: 'You know, it's over.'"

Gaza's population before the war was 2.3 million. Jordan, and Egypt have both made clear they will not take refugees from Gaza. On Sunday, the Jordanian foreign minister, Ayman Safadi, said his country's rejection of any displacement of Palestinians was "firm and unwavering".

Inside Gaza there is little sign that people who have endured over 15 months of fighting want to leave permanently in large numbers if a current ceasefire holds. Forced displacement of residents would be a war crime.

On Sunday thousands surged to Israeli military checkpoints, hoping to return to their homes in the north under the terms of a temporary ceasefire deal. [Israel](#) refused to let them pass, accusing Hamas of violating terms of the agreement.

*Drone footage shows thousands of Palestinians waiting to return to northern Gaza Strip - video*

"To 'clean' Gaza immediately after the war would in fact be a continuation of the war, through the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people," said Hassan Jabareen, the director of Palestinian rights group Adalah.

There would be little trust in any offer of temporary relocation outside Gaza to allow reconstruction, given a history of repeated displacements starting with the Nakba, or catastrophe, of 1948 in which about 700,000 Palestinians were expelled from their homeland after the creation of Israel. At the

time, many thought they were just leaving temporarily, and for decades held on to the keys for homes they hoped to reclaim.

Omer Shatz, a lecturer in international law at Sciences Po Paris and international criminal court (ICC) counsel, said Trump's comments were a "call for ethnic cleansing" that echoed calls from extremist Israeli politicians and public figures dating to the start of the war.

"We are witnessing an extremely dangerous but natural continuation of the dehumanisation and genocidal calls that we have seen from the most extreme voices inside Israel," he said.

In December Shatz detailed allegations of incitement to genocide by eight Israeli officials and public figures in a [landmark case](#) filed with the ICC. "This is evidenced by the fact that no one considers what the Gazans want, when they have barely started clearing out the rubble, finding the remains of their loved ones buried there," he said.

*Displaced Palestinians wait to be allowed to return to their homes in northern Gaza. Photograph: Hatem Khaled/Reuters*

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) civil advocacy rights group said Trump's suggestion was "delusional and dangerous nonsense" in a statement that also described it as a proposal for ethnic cleansing. "The Palestinian people are not willing to abandon Gaza, and neighbouring countries are not willing to help Israel ethnically cleanse Gaza," it said.

Trump's comments were welcomed by far-right Israeli politicians. The finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, described the relocation of Palestinians as a "great idea", and said he would work with the prime minister and cabinet to create an "operational plan for implementation" as soon as possible.

Despite the stance of Smotrich and his allies, Trump's suggestion went beyond current Israeli government policy, with the military poised to allow Gaza residents to return to homes in the north, said Prof Barak Medina, the chair in human rights law at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. It would also likely break international law.

"If the plan is to permanently relocate people, and especially if it is done by force, this is not acceptable," Medina said. "It will be clearly illegal but also impractical: none of the neighbouring countries will be willing to accept people that are expelled from their homeland. It also contradicts the stated policy of the Israeli government."

Before Trump took office, an official from his transition team said the administration was discussing relocating 2 million Palestinians [during reconstruction](#) if the current tentative ceasefire held.

In apparent tacit recognition of regional resistance to taking in more refugees, the official said one possible destination under consideration was Indonesia. Jakarta said it was not aware of any such plan.

Trump also said he would raise the prospect of Egypt as a destination for Palestinians from Gaza in a call scheduled with the president, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi. However, since the start of the war in 2023, Cairo has warned repeatedly against forced displacement of Palestinians from Gaza, and reinforced its border. Sisi has said any move to push Palestinians into Sinai would jeopardise relations with Israel, including the 1979 peace treaty between the two countries.

Hamas officials rejected Trump's suggestion, saying people who survived the war would not leave during peacetime, as did stranded Palestinians on the roads leading to north Gaza. "If he thinks he will forcibly displace the Palestinian people [then] this is impossible, impossible, impossible," said

Magdy Seidam. "The Palestinian people firmly believe that this land is theirs, this soil is their soil."

Mustafa Barghouti, a senior Palestinian politician, said he "completely rejected" Trump's comments, the Palestinian news agency Ma'an reported. Barghouti warned against attempts at "ethnic cleansing" in Gaza, saying: "The Palestinian people are committed to remaining in their homeland."

Trump has not laid out any vision for postwar governance in Gaza. While signing executive orders after his inauguration, he had discussed the territory as a real-estate prospect, praising its seaside location and weather. "I looked at a picture of Gaza, it's like a massive demolition site," he said on Tuesday, adding: "It's gotta be rebuilt in a different way."

Qatari officials who mediated the pause in fighting in Gaza described "any plan that would end with relocation or reoccupation" as a red line.

Trump's new administration has promised "unwavering support" for Israel, and key positions have been taken by hardline supporters of its expansion. His ambassador to the UN said in confirmation hearings that she considered Israel had a "biblical right" to the West Bank, which Israel occupied in 1967 but most of the world recognises as the heart of a future Palestinian state.

On Saturday Trump said he had ordered the resumption of shipments of some of the largest bombs to Israel, a widely expected move. Biden had paused delivery of the 2,000lb (907kg) bombs owing to concerns about civilian casualties in Gaza caused by the powerful weapons, which can rip through thick concrete and metal over a large area.

When asked why he released the powerful bombs, Trump responded: "Because they bought them."

**Emma Graham-Harrison** *in Jerusalem*

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## P.S.

• The Guardian. Sun 26 Jan 2025 20.02 CET:

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jan/26/trump-resumes-sending-2000-pound-bombs-to-israel-undoing-biden-pause>

• *Emma Graham-Harrison's articles in the Guardian:*

<https://www.theguardian.com/profile/emma-graham-harrison>

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