

Analysis | The Demon of Ethnic Cleansing Has Been Let Out of the Bottle in Israel

Sunday 16 February 2025, by [BENN Aluf](#) (Date first published: 9 February 2025).

Trump has normalized the discourse around ethnic cleansing in Gaza, revealing the aspirations of many Jews in Israel. The prime minister and defense minister have turned population transfer into government policy, advancing Kahane's legacy

Palestinians make their way after Israeli forces withdrew from the Netzarim Corridor, allowing people to travel in both directions between southern and northern Gaza, on Sunday. Credit: Dawoud Abu Alkas/Reuters

It's easy to disparage Defense Minister Israel Katz, with his big mouth, his awkward walk with his bulletproof vest, and his image as an outsider on security matters in contrast to the generals who held this post before him.

It would be wrong to deride his instruction to the Israel Defense Forces, given last Thursday, to prepare a plan for the "voluntary departure" of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, in the spirit of U.S. President Donald Trump's initiative.

This is the first time Israel has announced a practical plan for the expulsion of Arabs from territory it controls. From now on, [transfer is government policy](#).

Katz accompanied his order with a public reprimand of the head of Military Intelligence, Maj. Gen. Shlomi Binder, who warned of an escalation of the security situation in the occupied territories and of a deterioration of relations with Arab countries in response to Trump's plan. The message to senior officers was received: Promotion will depend on supporting transfer.

An extensive round of promotions is expected soon in the IDF, which will include the replacement of the people who will have responsibility for any transfer, such as the head of operations at the IDF General Staff and the head of the army's Southern Command.

Every appointment of an officer with the rank of colonel and above requires a signature by Katz, and the minister intends to install in the army the same tests of political loyalty established in the police by [departing Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir](#).

Katz's [transfer is intended to be "voluntary,"](#) depending on the willingness of Palestinians in Gaza who request to leave and on the willingness of other countries to take them in.

However, its implementation has not been placed under the jurisdiction of the ministries of foreign affairs, transportation, or tourism but rather given to the IDF. This suggests that Israel will not be setting up travel agencies for Gazans, offering them cheap flights or frequent flyer points.

Instead, it will likely encourage their departure [through starvation](#), or in the euphemistic words of [Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich](#), “management of humanitarian aid,” or by resuming the war to “annihilate Hamas,” as promised by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The idea is that, [as the cries of Gazans echo](#), countries worldwide will be moved to open their doors to refugees from Khan Yunis and Jabalya.

U.S. President Donald Trump welcomes Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the entrance of the White House in Washington, Tuesday. Credit: Leah Millis/Reuters

It’s also easy to mock Trump, who presents grandiose ideas and then retracts them, who is occupied with a show, not content, determining policy without preparatory staff work. But what can we do when he is the president, setting his agenda by shooting from the hip. Only two weeks ago, Trump enjoyed the veneration of Netanyahu’s opponents in Israel, after imposing a cease-fire on Netanyahu, including [the return of some of the hostages](#).

The just-not-Bibi camp waited excitedly for the collapse of the coalition and the end of the war. But this hope was dashed after the enthusiastic welcome Netanyahu received in the White House, replaced by the assessment that Trump utters nonsense, and that everything is a duplicitous show: He’ll say ‘transfer’ in order [to placate Smotrich and Ben-Gvir](#), but in practice will dictate a withdrawal from Gaza and reaching an agreement with Hamas.

In effect, Trump has released from the bottle the secret wishes of many Jews in Israel, who do not believe in the prospects of living alongside Arabs on the same strip of land. “It’s us or them,” in the right wing’s version, or “us here and them over there,” in the left wing’s formulation.

As one of the leaders of the Zionist left told me years ago: “In our hearts, [we are all Kahane](#); all the rest is a matter of education.” Opinion polls conducted in recent days confirm his argument: As soon as Trump normalized talk of ethnic cleansing, a large majority of Jews in Israel [wishes to kick Palestinians out of Gaza](#).

It’s also easy to feel derision for Netanyahu, the perennial leader who shirks any responsibility. What hasn’t been said about him – he doesn’t have any policies, he is a football kicked between the White House and the radical right in Israel, dreaming only of a stalemate and a status quo.

But when one examines his actions ever since he formed his narrow right-wing coalition a decade ago, and up to the management of the current war, as the head of a fully-right-wing government, one finds a clear trend indicating the fulfillment of the legacy of Rabbi Meir Kahane.

The list is long, and includes the nation-state law, which gave Jews a higher standing in Israel; moves toward [annexation and the expropriation of Palestinians](#) in the West Bank and Jerusalem; filling Likud ranks with Kahane-followers; his alliance with Ben-Gvir and Smotrich; and above all, a policy of deportation and ruin in Gaza in response to the Hamas attack on October 7 and the massacre in Israel’s border communities.

Netanyahu was willing to risk having an arrest warrant issued by the international court in The Hague and to face pressure by the Biden administration and its supporters in Israel who called on him to present a plan for the “[day after](#)” and the handing over of Gaza to the Palestinian Authority, only in order to move forward with emptying the Gaza Strip of its inhabitants and [preparing it for annexation and Jewish settlement](#).

Meir Kahane in 1984. Credit: Nati Hernik / GPO

A selection of speeches given by Kahane in his sole term as a Knesset member 40 years ago,

collected by our correspondent Ofer Aderet, reads like the platform of the current government. "There is a total discrepancy, an insoluble contradiction between the concept of Zionism and a Jewish state and the concept of a Western democracy," said Kahane, long before [Yariv Levin and his judicial overhaul](#).

"A state of Jewish sovereignty, in which the Jew is landlord...with the non-Jew having no right to say anything about national decisions pertaining to the fate of the state or nation," is what Kahane said in a speech, heralding Netanyahu's campaign in the last election, when he labeled Arab lawmakers as "supporters of terror."

And obviously, the Kahanist solution, transfer. "Every one will live in their own country...let them live there in love and fraternity and in coexistence with their brethren, an Arab coexistence, but not here." A veritable draft of the Trump initiative.

Kahane was seen as a thug and a marginal person, whom the Knesset ejected from its midst. His more institutional-centered heir who supported transfer, Rehavam Ze'evi, did not gain the support of the masses and was condemned in retrospect as a rapist and a criminal.

But their ideas did not go away, and a generation and a half later, they've arrived in the mainstream, which still hides behind hypocritical arguments such as "humanitarian concern for the Palestinians" or "we've already tried everything and the conflict has not been resolved; perhaps it's time for another solution." Thus, one must not mock Trump's declaration or Netanyahu's enthusiasm or Katz's orders.

The demon of ethnic cleansing that was let out of the bottle of political correctness and respect for human rights, a demon which was in hiding until now, will be hard to put back in the bottle.

Aluf Benn

P.S.

• Haaretz. Feb 9, 2025:
<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-02-09/ty-article/.premium/trump-and-netanyahu-are-fulfilling-a-legacy-of-jewish-supremacy-day-after-transfer/00000194-e71c-dc0f-a7de-ff3c10da0000>