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The US Plan to “Takeover” Gaza: Implications for Security and Stability in the Middle East

By Ghada Soliman

SYNOPSIS

On February 4, 2025, US President Donald Trump announced that the [US would take control](#) of the Gaza Strip and make it “[the Riviera of the Middle East](#)”, along with a suggestion that Palestinians there should relocate to other countries, particularly Jordan and Egypt. Trump’s announcement has ignited widespread criticism from the international community, including the Arab states. This astonishing change in US policy raises concerns about the future of a Palestinian state. It could heighten tensions, potentially empowering Hamas and increasing the risk of terrorism and conflict in the Middle East.

COMMENTARY

Trump’s intention to take control of Gaza can be seen as a significant shift in US foreign policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The US has been a [central player](#) in peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians for many years. This involvement dates back to the mid-20th century, particularly after the [1967 Six-Day War](#) when the US began taking on a more active role in mediating conflicts in the Middle East.

Despite being a strong ally of Israel, it has also extended support to Palestinians and [advocated for a two-state solution](#). Palestinians will view US control of Gaza as an [occupation](#) rather than support for Palestinian statehood, undermining the prospects for a Palestinian state.

It should be noted that the Gaza Strip is [governed by international law](#) and recognised as part of the Palestinian territories under Israeli military occupation. Therefore, any attempt to seize this territory by force would violate international law and the [principles outlined](#) in the UN Charter.

Reactions to Trump's Announcement

Global Resistance

While the international community's reaction to Trump's announcement was largely characterised by [scepticism and criticism](#), it was the Arab countries that reacted most vehemently. Leaders across the Arab world condemned the idea outright, including Egypt and Jordan, which categorically rejected Trump's idea of forcibly relocating Palestinians from Gaza to their territories. They viewed it as a violation of Palestinian rights and sovereignty. Saudi Arabia, a key state, has [reiterated its commitment](#) to a two-state solution, asserting that the normalisation of relations with Israel is contingent upon the establishment of a viable Palestinian state.

Hamas is Defiant

As for Hamas, it reiterated [Palestinian rejection](#) of any plans to uproot them from their homeland and emphasised their [determination to stay](#) and resist efforts to force them out. Trump's announcement came amidst ongoing tensions following the conflict that erupted on October 7, 2023, between Israel and Hamas. The latter is designated a [terrorist organisation](#) by Israel and the US, amongst other countries. Significantly, there are growing concerns that Trump's announcement may potentially jeopardise the [fragile ceasefire](#) between Israel and Hamas, which has entered "[phase two](#)" as of February 4, 2025.

Palestinian National Authority's Stance

Similarly, [Mahmoud Abbas](#), the head of the Palestinian National Authority, proclaimed that [Palestinians will not give up](#) their land, rights, or sacred sites. He emphasised that the Gaza Strip is an essential part of the territory of the State of Palestine, which also includes the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Egypt and Jordan

Egypt has historically been a key mediator between Israel and the Palestinians, particularly following the escalation of the conflict between Hamas and Israel on October 7. Before Trump's February 4 announcement, Egypt had already issued an earlier statement on January 26 [rejecting](#) Trump's [suggestion](#) made the day before that [Jordan](#) and Egypt should accept Gazans who have been internally displaced due to the conflict. In addition, Egypt has also emphasised its support for a two-state solution that envisions the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

On February 5, 2025, following Egypt's lead, Jordan also released a statement rejecting Trump's comments, cautioning that efforts to displace Palestinians could pose significant security risks.

Potential Implications in the Event of a US Takeover

Impact on Saudi-US-Israel Relations

Although Saudi Arabia had previously [expressed interest](#) in normalising ties with Israel because of [concerns over Iran's influence](#) in the region, US control of Gaza could dampen, if not destroy, its interest, as the latter would be perceived [as an aggressor](#). US capacity to mediate future peace agreements will be greatly diminished.

This may result in a vacuum that other international actors, such as [China](#) and [Russia](#), could exploit to strengthen their ties with Saudi Arabia and expand their influence in the Middle East. They might position themselves as alternative mediators, capitalising on the erosion of US credibility and its image as a regional peacekeeper.

Additionally, it is important to consider that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's [recent comment](#) on February 6, 2025, suggesting that Saudi Arabia has ample territory to establish a Palestinian state, could [further complicate the dynamics](#) between Saudi Arabia and Israel. This remark may increase Saudi animosity towards Israel.

A Boost to Hamas

Hamas has consistently positioned itself against Israeli actions and Western influence in Palestinian territories. An increase in the US presence could lead to the radicalisation of more disillusioned Palestinians by Hamas, raising security concerns for both Israel and any governing body established by the US.

According to the US, Hamas has already [managed to recruit](#) as many fighters as it lost since October 7, 2023. It is likely to grow in influence and capability if there is no clear alternative and a post-conflict plan with a credible political horizon for the Palestinian people. Thus, Hamas could re-emerge stronger, posing ongoing threats to stability in the Middle East.

Expansion of the Middle East Conflict

The displacement of Palestinians to Egypt, Jordan, or other countries in the Middle East following a US takeover of Gaza can create a fertile ground for radicalisation by terrorist groups. Displaced individuals often experience trauma, loss of community, and a sense of hopelessness. These factors can make them more susceptible to extremist ideologies propagated by terrorist groups. Such groups often exploit the vulnerable by offering a sense of belonging, purpose, or financial incentives for joining their ranks. It will be a challenge for the authorities to differentiate between Palestinians genuinely seeking refuge and those set on violence.

Egypt has made significant strides in combating terrorism in the Sinai Peninsula, particularly against the [Islamic State \(IS\)](#) affiliate, [Wilayat Sinai](#) in the Sinai Peninsula (SI-SP) in Egypt. Further displacement of Palestinians into Sinai could result in their integration with IS-SP elements, leading to coordinated attacks against Israel. Such developments could potentially plunge Egypt into further conflict and instability should the peninsula become a target for Israel. It is worth noting that the Sinai Peninsula is of strategic significance to Egypt, as the [Yom Kippur War](#) with Israel in 1973 had proven.

Jordan's demographic makeup puts it at risk of conflict. Over fifty per cent of its

[population](#) comprises those who identify as having Palestinian roots. An increase in this population through the resettlement of Palestinians from Gaza could alter the delicate balance within Jordanian society and potentially undermine political stability in the kingdom as the Palestinian population could actively seek independence or greater political representation.

Conclusion

It has been reported that the leaders of [Egypt](#) and [Jordan](#) plan to meet with Trump soon to explore an alternative solution to a US takeover of Gaza. However, should the takeover occur, it is likely to embolden Hamas to radicalise more Palestinians and recruit them for their cause, exacerbating existing tensions between it and Israel and neighbouring countries that will need to accommodate displaced Palestinians. The resulting escalation of tensions could lead to more terrorism and a destabilised Middle East.

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