

## Opinion

# Trump's Gaza power-trip tells us this: he is just another coward denying the need for a Palestinian state

Simon Tisdall



Benjamin Netanyahu called it 'groundbreaking' thinking, but it isn't. It is idiocy that will make a bad situation worse

Simon Tisdall is the Observer's foreign affairs commentator

Thu 6 Feb 2025 07.20 CET





It's easy to mistake sheer ignorance for brilliance. Seeming empathy conceals unfeeling stupidity. In demanding the permanent emptying of Gaza and the forcible resettlement of Palestinian civilians on a wholly imaginary "good, fresh, beautiful piece of land", [Donald Trump](#) tried to break the mould. Instead, he broke hearts - and the US's word. His so-called simple, brilliant big idea is for the simple-minded only - unworkable, unjust and tainted by wilful deceit, recklessness and the monstrous weight of his unleashed ego.

Trump's incoherent rambling does not amount to groundbreaking thinking, as Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu suggests, let alone a plan. It's more akin to bar-room talk by a loudmouthed boor. And yet it's very dangerous. The fundamentalist aim lurking beneath his mock concern is an enlarged and consolidated Israel occupying and "owning", through some bizarre form of US lend-lease, all of Gaza and possibly the West Bank. It means death to hopes of a Palestinian state. No wonder far-right Jewish nationalists and religious extremists cheer. No wonder [today's stern warning against "ethnic cleansing"](#) from UN secretary general, António Guterres and today's [prediction from Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas](#) that any such move would "put oil on the fire" in the region.

Take Trump's [basic premise](#). Gaza is a hellish demolition site, he says, unfit for human habitation. "Gaza is not a place for people to be living, and the only reason they want to go back ... is because they have no alternative." Yet who does he think is responsible for turning Gaza into a smoking wasteland where at least 47,000 people died in 15 murderous months? It's the man standing next to him. Step forward Netanyahu, prime minister of Israel, slayer of children and [indicted war crimes suspect](#).

Who else but Netanyahu, like-minded allies (and himself) does Trump think [might benefit from a Gaza "clean-out"](#)? Neighbouring Arab states such as Egypt and Jordan will not. They are understandably terrified at the prospect of importing into their territory up to 2 million Palestinians, with all the associated humanitarian, economic and security problems. And millions more may follow if the West Bank is "cleaned out", too.

Saudi Arabia's leadership is plainly unimpressed, and possibly quietly angry. Within hours of Trump's claim to the contrary, Riyadh stressed it remained firmly committed to a viable Palestinian state as a condition for giving Trump and Netanyahu what they dearly want - Israeli-Saudi normalisation. Trump blithely assumes the Saudis and Gulf states will willingly fund his Gaza "Riviera" redevelopment as well as possibly providing land. Wrong again.

Trump's proposals ignore the Palestinians' basic right to self-determination, as enshrined in international law and UN resolutions. They overturn decades of US and western policy - and his own first-term "peace plan" backing a two-state solution. Enforced eviction of millions of people from their homes and property smells like ethnic cleansing, as enacted in Bosnia in the 1990s and, recently, by [lawless Jewish settlers](#) in the West Bank.

Trump's real-estate takeover wheeze would encourage extremists on all sides. Does he really believe [Hamas](#), still in control of most of Gaza, would tamely concur? Any attempt to permanently remove the mass of Gaza's population would become a rallying cause for Israel's enemies. And it would embolden the far-right Jewish political groups that are most viscerally opposed to Palestinian rights and whose bigotry has fuelled mass killing in Gaza since the 7 October attacks.



■ 'This is our land': Palestinians reject Trump's plan for US to 'take over' Gaza - video

Trump's bird-brained scheme also drives a coach and horses, or a phalanx of US army Humvees, through solemn campaign promises to end US involvement in Middle East "forever wars". The Arabs, the Europeans and the UK are [unanimous in their condemnation](#). None would assist a US military takeover of Gaza. Large numbers of US troops would be required there, on a long-term basis. They would inevitably be targeted by Islamists. Gaza could become Trump's Iraq.

What a generous geopolitical gift that would be to the much-battered, Iranian-directed "axis of resistance". Hezbollah in Lebanon and assorted militias in Iraq and Yemen could be expected to join Hamas in a reviving anti-US, anti-western jihad.

Islamic State, rebuilding strength and reach in the ungoverned eastern deserts of post-Assad Syria, would not stay silent for long. Russia would welcome the distraction and the chaos, too.

As for Iran itself, Trump reintroduced “maximum pressure” sanctions this week. A US intelligence report suggested Tehran was considering a [short-cut pathway](#) to building a nuclear bomb. Netanyahu tells the White House ignoramus-in-chief at every turn that Iran poses an existential threat. Given his head, he would like to attack. Which way Trump jumps could be devastatingly consequential.

Netanyahu is emerging stronger as a result of [Trump’s intervention](#). Going into this week’s White House meeting, he was squeezed between far-right coalition parties, which want the war to resume and would like to seize and resettle Gaza and the West Bank, and the US, which ostensibly wants a permanent ceasefire and the return of all living hostages. Now, with Trump’s wildcard in his pocket, Netanyahu potentially escapes the trap. Opponents may find it harder to bring him down, even if he sabotages the ceasefire (which he is shaping up to do).

Hamas, too, now has additional incentives to walk away from the second phase of the truce, as some of its members would plainly prefer. With every hostage and prisoner swap, it has made a big show of having survived the Israeli onslaught and being back in charge. There is still no agreed, alternative “day after” plan for running [Gaza](#). As in Lebanon, where the ceasefire is similarly fragile, renewed warfare may be only one bomb, killing or airstrike away.

Trump’s absurdly impractical, unjust and illegal Gaza fantasy power trip is already exacerbating chronic instability in the Middle East. As is usual with him, this latest piece of self-indulgent idiocy will make a bad situation worse, even if it eventually comes to nothing.

It is also a prime example of what happens when scheming politicians tortuously twist and turn, desperately distort facts, deny obvious realities and flout common sense in order to avoid doing the right thing. In this case, the right thing is the only thing that can end the 77-year-long conflict: accepting the creation, in the land of Palestine, of a sovereign, independent Palestine state alongside Israel.

They just will not do it.

Simon Tisdall is the Observer’s foreign affairs commentator

---

---

---

---



---

## Most viewed

---