



EMERGENCY ARAB SUMMIT ON GAZA

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Arab leaders, joined by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, gathered this week in Cairo to discuss (and ultimately endorse) a [\\$53 billion Egyptian plan](#) for the reconstruction of Gaza. The emergency summit followed a smaller gathering in Riyadh late last month attended by Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Qatar and which laid the groundwork for a regional counterproposal to President Trump's highly controversial proposal to forcibly displace Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinian residents in order to redevelop the Strip into a flourishing (but not necessarily Palestinian) seaside enclave.

The Egyptian-led proposal could be viewed as a detailed vision for the implementation of Phase III of the US-facilitated Ceasefire Agreement between Israel and Hamas. It foresees an initial six-month recovery effort, followed by a comprehensive five-year reconstruction and redevelopment period. The issuance of the plan, however, comes amidst renewed concern that the parties may not be able to reach Phase III, after Hamas rejected an American proposal to extend the now-expired Phase I and Israel issued a new block on humanitarian aid entering the Strip, rather than launching negotiations over Phase II as had been previously agreed.

The massive price tag, which includes \$3 billion for the six-month early recovery stage alone, is optimistically envisioned to be shouldered by a mix of the United Nations and International Financial Institutions, donor countries, foreign direct investment from multinational corporations, and the mobilization of civil society organizations. Former Egyptian Foreign Minister and Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa made the [rounds](#) in Washington last week to drum up support for the proposal. He pushed the importance of its full economic and political implementation – to include a credible pathway to Palestinian statehood – as necessary to achieving donor buy-in by avoiding throwing good money after bad.

Hamas, the Palestinian Authority, and the Future of Gaza

One critical, but unaddressed detail is the future of Hamas in Gaza. While the terror organization is said to have agreed to forego any future role in the governance of the territory, it has steadfastly rejected calls to turn over its weapons. The UAE has reportedly based its support for the plan on the maximalist position of Hamas' immediate and complete disarmament, and certainly Israel (and the United States) are unlikely to agree to anything less. Other participants in this week's summit, though, are said to be advocating for a more gradual approach to the issue. Hamas itself welcomed the Egyptian plan, choosing to focus not on its provisions to ensure the terror group is prevented from re-gaining a chokehold over the territory, but rather its implied rebuke of the Trump Administration's proposal to relocate the Gazan population.

Hamas' removal from any governing role exposes the plan's second glaring weakness: ambiguity over both interim and long-term governance of Gaza. Egypt and Qatar would ostensibly support the establishment and functioning of a technocratic committee not aligned

with the Palestinian Authority (or any political party). The PA, which is deeply flawed, corrupt and barely holds on to a thread of legitimacy given the more than 15 years since it last held elections, is nonetheless the sole recognized governing body for the Palestinian territories. Ultimately its reform, and subsequent empowerment, are necessary precursors to both Gaza's future viability as well as that of a future Palestinian state. Additional fidelity is needed on how Palestinian neighbors will support that effort.

The third major weakness, or rather omission, of the proposal is the critical area of security. Israel will not and should not accept any scenario in which the events of October 7 could be repeated. While the United States has spent two decades training the Palestinian Authority Security Forces, few believe they will be prepared any time soon to assert security control over the Gaza Strip any more so than the PA is prepared to govern there. The options remaining all include some combination of Arab and international security forces, potentially under a UN mandate. While the Summit's final communique acknowledged the need for international peacekeepers, the devil is in the details. Egypt will need to play a pivotal role in shaping and supporting that effort as part of a parallel track to the broader negotiations.

US and Israel Reactions

The United States and Israel were initially quick to criticize the proposal, with the US National Security Council spokesperson fairly [noting](#) that it fails to "address the reality that Gaza is currently uninhabitable" before doubling down on President Trump's "Gaza Riviera" vision. Israel echoed the US position, and went further by criticizing inclusion of the Palestinian Authority and the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in the document, but without offering an alternative option for the delivery of government services or humanitarian aid. The Trump Administration, which has been pressing the Arab countries to take on more responsibility for Gaza, later softened its tone, however. Special Envoy for the Middle East Steven Witkoff told a gaggle of White House reporters that the plan contains "a lot of compelling features" and called it a good faith first step from the Egyptians before reiterating the Administration's view that Gaza would be uninhabitable for 10-15 years.

Next Steps

Two visions for Gaza's future are now on the table. The first, of course, is President Trump's Gaza Riviera, which continues to receive the full-throated endorsement of Prime Minister Netanyahu. The Israeli PM has asserted that all emigration of Palestinians from Gaza would be voluntary, but international rights organizations contend that the plans on the table are tantamount to forced displacement, which is a violation of the Geneva Convention. Setting aside that issue, the two countries at the heart of the idea – Jordan and Egypt – have roundly rejected it. Israel and the United States should pay heed. Israel's security today was built in large part on its peace treaties with Jordan and Egypt and their continued stability. Jordan's monarchy is already under pressure due to economic struggles, caused in significant part by its absorption in recent decades of over 2 million refugees from throughout the Middle East. Undermining the monarchy could set off significant unintended consequences both for Israel and the region

writ-large. Egypt is already in the middle of an economic crisis and has sought to partially address the added economic burden of Sudanese refugees fleeing civil war by closing its borders. Economic collapse would likewise set off destabilizing effects across the Middle East and Africa.

That leaves the Arab Summit proposal. For the reasons articulated above, it is both far from complete and far from perfect. What it offers, however, is a starting point for negotiations. Arab leaders have called for an international conference to further discuss and operationalize the plan, providing opportunity for both the United States and Israel to help refine it in a way that it meets their legitimate requirements. There is no alternative to getting their buy-in. Israel has demonstrated again this week that any delivery of aid or assistance goes through them. Ultimately, though, this provides long-sought Arab acceptance of responsibility for addressing at least some of the challenges associated with delivering a more peaceful and more stable future for Gaza, the Palestinian people, and Israel itself. Israel and the US should seek to build on that by opening the door to dialogue.