

ARGUMENT

An expert's point of view on a current event.

Trump's Gaza Proposal is Less Original Than He Thinks

His ethnic cleansing plan for Gaza reflects the same disregard for Palestinian rights that has handicapped U.S. policy for decades.

By **Matthew Duss**, the executive vice president at the Center for International Policy.



U.S. President Donald Trump chooses a reporter to ask a question at a joint press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Washington on Feb. 4. JOSHUA SUKOFF/MEDILL NEWS SERVICE/SIPA VIA AP IMAGES

My FP: You are currently not opted in. To begin receiving My FP email digests based on your interests [click here](#).

FEBRUARY 5, 2025, 3:21 PM

[View Comments](#) (0)

It's always tempting to dismiss Donald Trump's wilder remarks as flights of fancy. But we should be clear that his suggestion in a press conference alongside Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday that Gaza's population, which numbers over 2 million, should simply be moved out of the

territory so it can be redeveloped (presumably with Trump's companies getting a big piece of the action) constitutes nothing less than advocating a crime against humanity.

Trump's idea appears to have originated with—wait for it—his son-in-law Jared Kushner, who last year told a Harvard University audience (in a Middle East dialogues series at which I also spoke) that Gaza's "waterfront property" was "very valuable" and suggested that Israel should remove civilians while it "cleans up" the strip.

Trump's Second Term

Ongoing reports and analysis

Only somewhat less offensive than Trump's advocacy of ethnic cleansing has been the cascade of "told you so" remarks from liberal pundits, most of whom offered little if any criticism of President Joe Biden for unconditionally backing 15 months of the Israeli slaughter that brought us to this point and who continually dismissed the potential impact of Gaza on the U.S. election (except, apparently, for the purposes of blaming pro-Palestinian voters for Trump).

Thus far, the response from Democrats has been muted. One might hope that, with a Republican now back in the White House, more of them might magically resubscribe to the belief that silence in the face of crimes against humanity is bad.

In any case, the more effective opposition will likely come from countries in the region, many of whose governments have already made clear that Trump's proposal is a nonstarter. Trump and Kushner's supposed close allies in Riyadh rejected the expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza and reiterated once again that no peace and normalization with Israel will take place without the creation of a Palestinian state.

The promise of a Saudi-Israeli peace deal is ultimately what could put a brake on Trump's apocalyptic daydream. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has made clear that he understands it would be political suicide for him to move forward with such an agreement in the absence of any path to Palestinian self-determination.

While he personally doesn't care very much about the Palestinians, he knows that people in his country and in the region very much do. (Yes, we've come to a place where Saudi Arabia seems more committed to international law and the protection of civilians than the United States.)

While it's possible that Trump has proposed the mass expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza as a bargaining ploy, creating a potential "concession" out of thin air, we shouldn't lose sight of the gravity

of this moment.

The president of the United States has made the commission of a crime against humanity the explicit policy of his administration. The fact that Trump sees such a proposal as within the realm of acceptable discussion is itself a reflection on our deeply broken and corrupt political discourse, especially as it relates to the Palestinians.

While Trump's proposal was particularly offensive, Tuesday's press conference with Netanyahu demonstrated more continuity than many in Washington would like to admit. The spectacle of a U.S. president and an Israeli prime minister presuming to determine between themselves the future of the Palestinians is emblematic of decades of U.S. policy toward the conflict and a key reason for that policy's consistent and continued failure. Trump is making the same mistake as past administrations, albeit in a bigger and uglier way.

One part of Trump's proposal—the rebuilding and economic redevelopment of Gaza—is necessary for a future of coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians. Trump is right that the beautiful seaside territory has enormous potential for development. But Palestinians deserve to benefit from that potential, and will have a say in that future, one way or the other.

If Trump truly wants that future to be peaceful, he'll need to acknowledge that reality and retreat from the path he has proposed.

This post is part of FP's ongoing coverage of the Trump administration. Follow along [here](#).

My FP: You are currently not opted in. To begin receiving My FP email digests based on your interests [click here](#).

Matthew Duss is the executive vice president at the Center for International Policy. He served as a foreign-policy advisor to U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders from 2017 to 2022. X: [@mattduss](#)