Netanyahu rejects Trump’s Gaza plan, pursues Greater Israel agenda

Jean Shaoul
14 August 2026

Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has categorically rejected the US disarmament roadmap for Gaza that President Donald Trump described as “HISTORIC” and “monumental”.

Insisting that Israel will not withdraw its armed forces until Hamas has completely disarmed, Netanyahu made clear that the future he envisages for Gaza remains one emptied of its Palestinian citizens through ethnic cleansing.

The Israeli military’s three-year-long campaign has killed more than 73,300 Palestinians, at least two thirds of whom were women and children, while an untold number have died from disease, malnutrition and lack of medical treatment. Much of the 2.3 million population has been rendered homeless.

Israel has transformed Gaza into a wasteland, destroying agricultural land, water purification facilities, local markets, communal food pantries, municipal infrastructure, roads, hospitals, mosques, schools, universities and the social infrastructure on which modern life depends. The remaining population has been made almost entirely dependent on an aid infrastructure that Israel can turn on and off at will to terrorise the Palestinians into submission.

Trump’s plan for Gaza, signed amid much fanfare at Sharm el-Sheikh in October 2025, was never more than the official endorsement by Washington and its European and Middle Eastern allies of an Israeli policy already in operation—but with the US, not Israel, reaping the economic rewards of the development of land seized. The arrangement would be partially managed by some coalition of Arab powers to give it a more acceptable face.

This was a potentially lucrative prize. The 40-kilometer Gaza coastline is estimated to have a $50 billion real estate and tourism potential and to offer control of billions more in offshore natural gas reserves. The scheme’s broader purpose was to facilitate wider regional cooperation in the coming US-Israel war on Iran by reducing the visibility of Israel’s increasingly unpopular war among the restive populations of Washington’s despotic allies.

Israel’s subsequent actions made clear that it never intended to accept a genuine withdrawal, or external interference with its plans to control Gaza. In December, Defence Minister Israel Katz declared that Israel “will never leave all of Gaza”.

This position is endorsed by the cabinet and shared by much of the political opposition. Gadi Eisenkot, a former military chief of staff and Netanyahu’s principal challenger for the premiership, served in Netanyahu’s cabinet during the first eight months of the war and supported the wars in Lebanon and Iran; he too opposes Trump’s Board of Peace deal.

Far from implementing the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement, Israel has continued almost daily attacks across Gaza, killing 1,300 Palestinians, while expanding its territorial control from the 53 percent sanctioned under the agreement to more than 70 percent.

The same strategy is being pursued in the West Bank. Israel has presided over an expansion of Jewish settlements and escalating settler violence against Palestinians and their property, carried out with the support of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). The most recent provocation began on Sunday, when settlers, who operate with near total impunity, blocked the road to the homes of Palestinian families—including some who held US citizenship—in Qusra, in Nablus province, and cut off their power and water supplies.

The first Israeli soldiers who came to the site solidarized with the settlers and prayed with them. On Wednesday, Israeli security forces confronted a much larger group of settlers, using tear gas and stun grenades in an attempt to dislodge them. Last month, settlers set fire to a newly completed mosque.

These provocations are bound up with a policy of de facto annexation led by far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who has channelled ever more public money into the settlements. Smotrich has declared that the next Israeli government should push Palestinians to flee the area. He and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir have also called for expanding Israeli borders and establishing an Israeli

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military or civilian presence in parts of Lebanon and Syria.

The consequences of this Greater Israel offensive are stark. According to the UN, Israeli forces and settlers have killed 76 Palestinians, including 18 children, in the West Bank this year, while settler violence, demolitions and evictions have displaced around 3,800 Palestinians, nearly half of them children.

US ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee condemned the settlers as "criminal" in a rare rebuke from a US official. But while the White House is reportedly furious at the government's failure to rein in the rampant settler violence, Trump has so far remained publicly silent.

The events follow weeks of increasingly frosty relations over disagreements about the war in Iran. Netanyahu had hoped his meeting with Trump at the White House last month would allow him to bolster his election chances by parading his close relationship with the leader of the world's most powerful country. Instead, the low-profile meeting ended without a joint statement to the media, with Netanyahu leaving through a side door.

Trump's proposal on Gaza was always likely to collide with Netanyahu's strategy. On July 30, his Board of Peace unveiled a plan for the second phase of the Gaza agreement, based on a phased reciprocal process in which Hamas would surrender its weapons as Israel withdrew from Gaza. Hamas would hand over its weapons for storage under a US-backed Palestinian technocratic administration supervised by the Board of Peace. Hamas accepted the arrangement following pressure from Qatar, Turkey and Egypt.

But an Israeli withdrawal is precisely what Netanyahu cannot accept. He immediately authorised a wave of airstrikes that killed 18 people, one of the deadliest days since the supposed October ceasefire. The apparent aim was to provoke a militant response from Hamas that could then be used to justify a return to full-scale war.

Three days after Trump's announcement, following a "difficult" meeting with Netanyahu in Jerusalem, the Board of Peace issued a "clarification" requiring Hamas to complete its disarmament before Israel withdrew. Even this concession was insufficient. On Sunday, August 9, facing mounting opposition from far-right cabinet ministers who want to expel Palestinians from Gaza and establish Israeli settlements there, Netanyahu publicly rejected the plan.

He told his cabinet: "Israel rejects the 15-point document." The Israel Defense Forces, he said, "will not carry out any withdrawal until Hamas is disarmed", which meant the surrender of "all weapons". He reiterated that no Palestinian state would arise while he remained prime minister.

Accepting Trump's Gaza proposal would have exposed Netanyahu's long-promised "total victory" over Hamas and the Palestinians of Gaza as a fiction, while enraging the far-right coalition partners on whom he depends to remain in power after the October 27 elections. His Likud bloc is trailing in the polls and his long-running corruption trial is at a critical point.

Netanyahu's position points to a strategy of permanent war—not only against the Palestinians, but against Hezbollah in Lebanon, Syria and Iran. His statement follows Israel's de facto rejection of a US-brokered Lebanon ceasefire and support for the continuation of the US-led war against Iran.

Israel's relentless war flows from the logic of the Zionist state, founded on the expulsion and dispossession of 750,000 Palestinians in 1948 and the refusal to allow them or their descendants to return to their homes. This established a political order dependent upon permanent confrontation with its neighbours.

The Israeli state has consequently built much of its political identity around the narrative of a permanent existential threat. Any form of accommodation between Washington and Tehran, however partial or temporary, would fundamentally undermine that narrative.

Iran's support for Hezbollah and Hamas has made it a major obstacle to Israel's regional ambitions, while removing Iran as a regional power would facilitate Israel's attempt to complete the dispossession of the Palestinians and establish unchallenged regional hegemony—described by Netanyahu as "redrawing the map of the Middle East". The Iranian threat has also provided successive Israeli governments with a means of diverting attention from domestic crises, deteriorating economic and social conditions and deep political polarisation.

Israel has been able to pursue this strategy because it can ultimately rely on Washington, which provides it with $3.8 billion a year in military aid and treats it as its principal regional proxy. What unites them, despite repeated clashes, is a shared class interest in crushing any Palestinian, Arab nationalist, Iranian or working-class challenge to their domination of the world's most strategically vital, oil-rich region—a domination that Washington regards as essential to preparing for confrontation with China.

There have been periodic tensions before between Tel Aviv and Washington, as over the 2015 nuclear deal and now Gaza and the West Bank. But these are tactical disputes within a fundamentally aligned imperialist relationship.

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