

# ‘He kind of got bored’

How Trump’s hopes of Gaza peace fade away



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (L) talks to US President Donald Trump during a meeting in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington on April 7, 2025.  
● KEVIN DIETSCH/GETTY IMAGES



“In the beginning of the administration, all the promise was on Gaza,” said Ilan Goldenberg, a Middle East specialist in the Obama and Biden administrations. “But when the cease-fire fell apart, Trump basically gave the Israelis the green light to do whatever they wanted.”

  
By Michael Crowley  
Journalist  
**PERSPECTIVE**

When President Trump hosted Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel at the White House in early April, a reporter reminded Trump that his 2024 campaign promise to end the war in Gaza remained unfulfilled. Israel had recently broken a tenuous cease-fire in its 18-month war with Hamas and renewed its bombardment of Gaza. But Trump professed optimism. “I’d like to see the war stop,” he replied. “And I think the war will stop at some point that won’t be in the too-distant future.” One month later, prospects for peace in Gaza have dimmed even further. Netanyahu warned on Monday of an “intensive” Israeli escalation in the Palestinian enclave after his security cabinet approved plans to call up tens of thousands of reservists for a fresh assault there. Israeli hawks insist that only force can pressure Hamas into finally releasing the more than 20 captives it still holds captive and end the conflict. But many analysts say a major Israeli escalation could kill any hope left for peace. The question now is how Trump will react. Analysts said that, after an early flurry of diplomacy to free the captives and reach a long-term settlement, Trump and his senior officials have grown distracted from the conflict. That has amounted to something of a free hand for Netanyahu, who appears prepared to use it. “In the beginning of the administration, all the promise was on Gaza,” said Ilan Goldenberg, a Middle East specialist in the Obama and Biden administrations. “But when the cease-fire fell apart, Trump basically gave

the Israelis the green light to do whatever they wanted.” “My sense is he’s not that involved,” added Goldenberg, who is now a senior vice president at J Street, a center-left Jewish political advocacy group. “He kind of got bored.” Trump plans to travel to the Middle East next week, with stops in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. A violent escalation in Gaza would be frustrating for Trump, a stark reminder that he has failed to deliver the peace he promised. Yet, it is possible that Trump has lost patience and welcomes talk in Israel of inflicting a final, crushing blow against Hamas in what Netanyahu said his military officials told him would be “the concluding moves” of the war. Trump may also have a high tolerance for Israel’s use of heavy force. He has warned Hamas that “all hell” will break loose if the group does not re-

lease the remaining captives. Michael Makovsky, the president and chief executive of the hawkish Jewish Institute for National Security of America, agreed that Trump was less engaged with Israel on the subject of Gaza than the Biden administration was. President Joseph R. Biden Jr. and his top officials spent a vast amount of time after the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks trying to manage Israel’s Gaza campaign. Their goal was to limit civilian suffering in Gaza and save Israel from international condemnation, even if critics called them far too tolerant of Israel’s use of force. Trump has shown flashes of concern for Gaza’s population, and said on Monday that he would help Gazans “get some food” amid an Israeli blockade. But his attention to the conflict has been sporadic. “It’s like night and day with the Biden administration, which was trying to micromanage Israel’s operations,” Makovsky said.

Israeli officials are not “getting phone calls,” he said. “I don’t think they’re being pressed about how many aid trucks are coming in.” Axios reported on Monday that Israel would launch a new ground operation in Gaza if a deal with Hamas was not reached by the time Trump returned from his trip to the region. Makovsky, who recently attended meetings with senior Israeli officials, said that the report matched his understanding. When it comes to the Middle East, he added, Trump has been more focused on nascent diplomacy aimed at stopping Iran from developing a nuclear bomb. In a statement on Monday, Brian Hughes, a spokesman for the National Security Council, said that Trump “remains committed to securing the immediate release” of captives and “an end to Hamas rule in Gaza”. He added that “Hamas bears sole respon-

sibility for this conflict and for the resumption of hostilities.” One sign of the shifting focus is the portfolio of Trump’s special envoy for the Middle East, Steve Witkoff. In the early days of Trump’s presidency, Witkoff threw himself into Israel-Hamas diplomacy in pursuit of extending a temporary cease-fire agreement reached on January 15. But Witkoff has since become a kind of roving super envoy who juggles many missions. The former real estate developer and longtime Trump friend has also taken on the Iran file and met with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia four times to discuss Ukraine. There is little to suggest that Secretary of State Marco Rubio has stepped in. Rubio, whom Trump last week also gave the job of national security adviser, has yet to visit Israel.

The article first appeared on The New York Times.



Islam Abu Sahloul (c) mourns the death of her sister Lamia, 32, who was killed when an Israeli army strike hit a house, killing at least five people, in Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip, on May 1, 2025.  
● ABDEL KAREEM HANA/AP