

Egypt crucial to Trump's Gaza plan but fears security vacuum


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OPINION

Egypt has handled several negotiations between Israel and Hamas in partnership with Qatari, Turkish, and US officials. That is in keeping with its policy of trying to ensure that the resolution of the conflict is a collective effort. Egypt has taken a firm position on its own national security interests in talks. It has ruled out taking sole responsibility for Gaza, which it insists is ultimately for Palestinians to take on, with international support. And it has emphasized its refusal to allow mass displacement of Palestinians into its Sinai region, which borders the Gaza Strip. Its involvement in the Gaza peace process thus far has been relatively low-key, although Egyptian intelligence officials, military leaders, and diplomats have been heavily engaged behind the scenes. However, now that the Trump plan has gotten over its first hurdles, the next steps will require significant input from Egypt. President Abdel-Fattah Sisi's government is keen to contribute to a reconstruction effort. But the Trump plan also raises significant security concerns — not least that Egypt could be sucked into a prolonged commitment without sufficient support from other countries.

Strained Egypt-US relations
Egyptian relations with the Trump administration have been strained over Gaza. Sisi aborted plans to visit Washington at the start of this year after President Trump unveiled his "Gaza Riviera" scheme, maintaining minimal contact since. Indeed, the Riviera scheme spurred Egypt to develop its own plan for Gaza's reconstruction.



(Front L-R) Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, US President Donald Trump, the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and other leaders pose for a family picture at the Gaza summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, on October 13, 2025.
● EVAN VUCCI/APP

Relations with Israel, meanwhile, have sunk to a new low. On September 15, Sisi gave a strongly worded speech in Doha, condemning Israel's botched attempt to assassinate Hamas leaders in the Qatari capital. Egypt's recently beefed-up military presence in Sinai has also drawn complaints from Israel, although its purpose appears to be deterrence against any Israeli move to expel Palestinians, rather than an offensive threat. This is a challenging context for the Trump plan: In the coming phases, Egypt will become a crucial player. Its cooperation will be vital to facilitate the flow of aid into the territory. And Egypt could potentially contribute to the International Security Force (ISF) the plan calls for. Egyptian wariness of being drawn too deeply into Gaza is not only due to the US and Israel. Historical factors are important: Egypt's occupation of Gaza after the creation of Israel in 1948 was an unhappy experience for

all concerned, and provided no defence against Israel's occupation of Sinai in 1967. The Egyptian government also has concerns relating to the domestic economy, which is showing signs of improvement after a testing period. If Egypt were to get sucked into an active security role in Gaza, potentially bringing increased friction with Israel, it could have a negative impact on the recent recovery in foreign investment inflows and on the burgeoning tourism sector. Another issue is Egypt's reliance on natural gas imports by pipeline from Israel. These are continuing, and there is an agreement to increase them. Egypt also imports liquefied natural gas (LNG) and is boosting the capacity of receiving terminals, but these are more expensive than the pipeline supplies from Israel.

Problems with Trump plan for Gaza
The Trump plan calls for aid

deliveries to be stepped up, including through the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza, which is to be opened in both directions. But the plan does not spell out what will happen to the Israeli military presence on the Gaza side of this crossing, and in the Philadelphi Corridor. It only states that the ISF will work with Egypt and Israel to help secure border areas and train new Palestinian police forces. The make-up of the ISF and its financing have yet to be decided. The plan sketches out a process for disarming Hamas, but without any clear enforcement mechanism. It states that as a first step, once all the captives are released, Hamas members who forego violence and give up their weapons will receive an amnesty, while others will get safe passage out of Gaza. Later on, independent monitors are supposed to oversee a comprehensive process of demilitarization. This element has

echoes of the decommissioning process in Northern Ireland, although the situation in Gaza is very different. This lack of detail will be of concern to Egypt. It poses the risk of a security vacuum in Gaza, leading to pressure on Egypt to fill it on a supposedly temporary basis — one that could easily turn into a long and costly embroilment. Tony Blair, the former UK prime minister, is set to play a role in the "Board of Peace," a body headed by Mr. Trump that will oversee the political process and reconstruction, including financing, until the Palestinian Authority is deemed to be ready to take charge. Day-to-day operations will be conducted by a committee of Palestinian technocrats. Egypt will look to be involved in both the oversight body and in the selection of the administrative committee. But it faces the risk that it is forced to assume more and more responsibility as the attention of the international players wanes. There is also the ever-present risk of Israel making unhelpful interventions, while there is likely to be score-settling and turf wars among a multitude of Palestinian factions. Being drawn into such conflicts could make Egyptian involvement unpopular at home as well as in Gaza.

Regardless, if the new plan gains momentum, Egypt's involvement in Gaza is likely to increase. This will bring some benefits through the management of aid logistics and reconstruction, provided that there is sufficient international finance deployed. But Egypt will be determined to use talks to lock in collective international responsibility for Gaza's security — and for driving forward a political process that, as the plan states, could create "a credible pathway to Palestinian statehood and self-determination".

The full article first appeared on Chatham House.

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Israeli military vehicles drive through the occupied Philadelphi Corridor, a buffer zone between Gaza and the Egyptian border that extends for 14 kilometers, on September 13, 2024.
● AMIR COHEN/REUTERS