

[Israel-Hamas war](#)

Israel unveils plan for complete postwar control of Gaza



Netanyahu document on future of besieged Palestinian enclave at odds with US aims

Mehul Srivastava and **Neri Zilber** in Tel Aviv, **Heba Saleh** in Cairo and **Lauren Fedor** in Washington YESTERDAY

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has finally unveiled Israel's plans for Gaza after hostilities end in the enclave, submitting to his war cabinet a formal proposal that directly contradicts the objectives of the US.

The one-page document, released overnight by his office, makes no mention of any role for the Palestinian Authority, the West Bank-based rival to Hamas that the Biden administration wants to see take over control, and rejects unilateral international steps towards recognition of a Palestinian state.

It also foresees a sizeable security buffer within the besieged enclave, an outcome the US has made clear it opposes. John Kirby, spokesperson for the US National Security Council, on Friday said "we don't believe in any reduction of the size of Gaza".

While vaguely worded, and appealing to his domestic rightwing political base, the Israeli document entitled "The Day After Hamas Principles" is the first official distillation of Netanyahu's prior statements on the issue. It is not clear whether the war cabinet was asked to vote on it.

Dividing Gaza's future into near, medium and long-term phases, it makes clear that Israel will continue its long-running blockade of the enclave and intends to remain involved in civilian life there, including local policing and the teachings of schools and mosques.





A Palestinian woman gestures amid the rubble of the al-Faruq mosque following an Israeli air strike in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip © Said Khatib/AFP/Getty Images

In practice, the plan could involve a full-scale resumption of Israeli control of the enclave and its 2.3mn population, combining elements of its decades-long occupation with the punishing blockade instituted in 2007.

Kirby said the Biden administration had been “clear” about its views, and had “constructive discussions” with the Israelis in recent weeks.

“We believe that whatever post-conflict Gaza looks like, the Palestinian people should have a voice and a vote in what that looks like through a revitalised Palestinian Authority,” Kirby told reporters on Friday.

He said the US opposed reducing the size of Gaza or displacing Palestinians outside the territory. “And of course, we don’t see Gaza dominated . . . or governed over by Hamas . . . We have made that consistently clear with our Israeli counterparts,” Kirby added.

He also said he was “disappointed” by reports on Friday that Israel planned to build thousands of new settlement homes in the West Bank. He said new settlements were “counterproductive to the cause of peace” and “inconsistent with international law”.

The US, Israel’s closest ally, and the EU have been pushing a different postwar plan for Gaza that envisages the relatively secular Palestinian Authority, headed by President Mahmoud Abbas, taking over control, nearly two decades after it was ousted by the Islamist [Hamas movement](#). That would lay the groundwork for talks leading to a Palestinian state.

A spokesperson for Abbas told the Wafa news service that “Netanyahu’s proposed plans aim to perpetuate Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories and prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state”.

“Gaza will only be part of the independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital,” they said.

Netanyahu released the plan as Brett McGurk, the US Middle East envoy, visited Israel and the region.

Israel’s medium-term plans will only come into play once it declares victory in its

[military campaign against Hamas](#) and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a smaller, Iran-backed militant group — a point that could still be many months away.

The operation has claimed the lives of at least 29,000 Palestinians, according to local health authorities, and the widescale destruction of Gaza's civilian infrastructure.

Israel launched its war, now in its fourth month, after Hamas mounted a cross-border raid on October 7, killing 1,200 people and taking about 250 hostages, according to Israeli authorities.

In the medium term, Israel's plan sets out the intention to build a "security area" within the Gaza Strip, running along its entire border. It also intends to build an over- and underground "security flank" or barrier along its frontier with Egypt to prevent weapons smuggling, and to enforce land, sea and air control over the strip, the document said.

Israel will only allow weapons required "to maintain public order", an opaque reference to a police force that has largely vanished after being targeted by Israeli air strikes.

The plan said that in the civilian sphere, Israel will only allow "local actors with management experience" to enforce public order, and that this undefined group "will not be identified with states or bodies that support terror, and will not receive salaries from them".

The latter reference is a rightwing Israeli catchphrase for the PA, the impoverished body set up by the 1993 Oslo peace accords to administer civilian life in pockets of the occupied territories.

Any reconstruction of Gaza will be delayed to an unnamed date after Israel completes its military objectives.

The document said Israel intends to choose who may lead Gaza's reconstruction, and will embark on a "comprehensive deradicalisation programme in all religious education and social institutions in Gaza, done with involvement and assistance of Arab states".

The document said Israel will also work to close 75-year-old UNRWA, the primary UN relief agency for some 5mn Palestinians, and replace it with "responsible international aid organisations". Israel has accused at least a dozen [UNRWA employees of taking part in the October 7 raid](#).

“Calls by Israel for UNRWA’s closure are not about the agency’s neutrality,” the agency’s commissioner-general Philippe Lazzarini said in a letter to the UN General Assembly released on Friday. “Instead, they are about changing the long-standing political parameters for peace in the occupied Palestinian territory.”

In the long term, the Israeli document rejects any internationally imposed solution, including the prospect of the recognition of a Palestinian state, but leaves open the possibility of direct negotiations for “a final status agreement”.

That is how Israel refers to the long-dormant peace talks sparked by the Oslo accords and mothballed by Netanyahu for more than a decade.

“Israel utterly rejects international diktats in the matter of a final status arrangement with the Palestinians,” the document said. “Such an arrangement will only be reached in direct negotiations.”

An EU official said the bloc’s position was that Israel “cannot stay in Gaza over the long term, cannot reoccupy it, nor keep control over it” and that it should be governed by the Palestinian Authority.

Additional reporting by Alice Hancock in Brussels

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