

Beyond Sharm El-Sheikh: Hostage exchange was the easy part, Israel-Palestine peace plan enters choppy waters now

Israel Palestine peace plan, Sharm El-Sheikh summit: Netanyahu has reasons to not see the peace deal work. Trump, eventually, may feel he has no reason to continue enforcing it. And Palestinians, as is often the case, have had little say in the process.

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US President Donald Trump with Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as he arrives at Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv, Israel, Monday, Oct. 13, 2025. (AP Photo)

Israel Palestine peace plan: US President Donald Trump has declared the war in Gaza “over” as he heads to the Red Sea resort city of Sharm El-Sheikh in Egypt for a peace summit that

marks the release of the Israeli hostages and Palestinian detainees. The hostage release kicked off early this morning, with the Israeli government saying it will free about 2,000 Palestinian detainees under the agreement. Hamas has said that all 20 living hostages will be released to the Red Cross, followed by the handover of 28 bodies.

The [big questions](#), though, are if this truce will continue to hold and what comes next. An agreement is yet to be reached on Gaza's post war governance and the territory's reconstruction. The exchange of hostages and detainees was the easy part, though for Hamas, it does mean a complete loss of whatever leverage it had in this conflict so far. It is all downhill from here.

The hurdles

There are multiple stumbling blocks. The hostage exchange was point number one in Trump's 20-point plan, literally signalling the first phase of the initiative. The heavy-lifting was to come after this, including issues such as the disarming of Hamas, the security guarantee for Gaza and the far bigger task of rebuilding the enclave, which is pretty much a demolition site now.

Then follows the painstaking task of progressively rehabilitating the displaced and getting them continuing aid. And even if all this is done, the bigger question is: who will govern Gaza, if not the Hamas or the Palestinian Authority, as has been suggested in the deal. There's one vague reference to Palestinian statehood, but no tangible commitment to that in the text that follows. What happens to that festering issue?

The problem with the spectacle likely to unfold at Sharm El-Sheikh is that it will be just that — a spectacle. None of the leaders assembling there have a shared vision of what to do next. The only consensus is they want to be seen as following the lead of [Donald Trump](#). At the heart of this conflict is the question of occupation and the denial to one of the parties to the conflict to even participate in the building of a peace plan. That issue is unaddressed. The Palestinians have had no voice in this peace plan; they were not even at the table.

“If Hamas refuses to disarm and relinquish control over Gaza, today is little more than a temporary cease fire,” Jonathan Conricus, Senior Fellow at the Washington [DC](#)-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), a non-partisan institution focusing on national security and foreign policy, and former IDF spokesperson, said in a post on X.

Also, the problem is that after the hostage exchange and the bash at the Egyptian resort is over, and everybody goes back home, there is a chance that the situation could go back to where it started, according to Nader Hashemi, the Director of the Alwaleed Center for Muslim-

Christian Understanding and an Associate Professor of Middle East and Islamic Politics at the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University.

The basic questions that are at the heart of this enduring conflict have been ignored largely in Trump's so-called peace plan. And that's the issue of the occupation of the Palestinian territories by Israel, and the inability, or the refusal, of the international community to deal with that fundamental subject. Is Hamas sincere about eventually handing over all functions of the government to someone else in Gaza? Looks totally unlikely.

The international stabilisation forces in Trump's plan, which are supposed to consist of Arab and Muslim states, is unlikely to make a dent without Hamas agreeing to disarm and allowing this force to come in. That is the only way things can move forward. Hamas has not said anything about disarming as yet.

Trump's leverage, and interests

The big positive in the larger picture is Trump's extraordinary leverage over Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#). Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving Prime Minister, has repeatedly described Trump as "the best friend Israel has ever had in the Oval Office". Netanyahu has previously scored political points by browbeating American democratic administrations and exploiting political divisions over the Palestinian issue in the US.

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While former president [Joe Biden](#), in all fairness, did kick off parts of this peace plan, including the process of hostage release, he was faced with a wrangling within his party, especially from some of the left-leaning members. That is something that Netanyahu exploited to the hilt. Now with Trump, he wouldn't dare do any of that.

Trump knows that and has used that leverage when he needs to, whether in forcing Netanyahu to accept a deal early this year that brought 30 of the living hostages and eight deceased hostages home, or in June, when during the 12-day war between Israel and Iran, Trump ordered Israel to call off an imminent airstrike, posting an order on Truth Social: "BRING YOUR PILOTS HOME NOW." Israeli jets are reported to have turned around mid-air.

And just before the announcement of this peace plan, Netanyahu was literally forced to apologise to Qatar for the killing of a Qatari citizen during an unprecedented Israeli attack on Hamas leaders in Doha last month. The White House said that during the call, Netanyahu

acknowledged Israel violated Qatari sovereignty and said it would not happen again. That kind of leverage over Netanyahu by an American President is unprecedented.

The question though, is whether Trump himself would be invested in seeing his 20-point plan work out, down to the last detail. That, commentators say, looks highly unlikely. Trump is already disappointed that he did not win the Nobel Peace Prize for this initiative, which means that he is unlikely to be interested in investing more time in this issue now that the Peace Prize has been awarded to somebody else.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu, the other significant party to this deal, is also not very keen to see this peace plan work. This is because the conflict, Israel's longest since 1948, provides a distraction from Netanyahu's own domestic problems, including legal troubles and a disruptive fight with the judiciary. A permanent ceasefire could stoke the clamour within Israeli society to hold Netanyahu accountable for security lapses that led to the events of October 7 in the first place, and restart the corruption probe that was underway when the attack happened.

Analysts point to the distinct possibility that Netanyahu, over the course of the next few weeks or months, will allege that Hamas has likely violated some clause of the peace pact, and cite that as a reason to go back on his endorsement of the deal. By then, the dust would have settled on the events of Sharm El-Sheikh and the difficulties in implementing the more untenable clauses of the peace deal would have dawned on everyone, including Trump.

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