

# As Trump unveils his Board of Peace, Delhi waits, watches

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PM Modi and US President Donald Trump

As US President Donald Trump unveiled his Board of Peace and son-in-law Jared Kushner announced plans for a 'New Gaza' rebuilt from the ruins of the Israel-Hamas war, India stayed away from the ceremony in Davos Thursday, opting to walk the diplomatic tightrope for now by neither declining nor accepting [Trump's invitation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to join the board](#).

Sources said India has strong reasons for not joining the board immediately, and will prefer to wait and watch. It's weighing a range of factors – from the cast of countries on the board, its legitimacy and longevity, challenge to the UN framework and multilateralism, the board's scope and mandate, India's own stand of a negotiated two-State solution to the Israel-Palestine question, and consequences from Trump if it does not join or vacillates.

First, Delhi wants to see which countries are on the board – Trump's invitation has been accepted by Argentina, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belarus, Bulgaria, Egypt, Hungary, Indonesia, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Morocco, Mongolia, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

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The countries that have signed on to the board include West Asia majors Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel, UAE, Turkey and Jordan. But Europe has largely stayed away. Trump ally Hungary has accepted his invitation but France, Germany, UK, Sweden and Italy have not joined. Permanent members of the UN Security Council – Russia, China, France and UK – have not joined and there's a view in Delhi that the board, at least for now, lacks both heft and legitimacy.

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Second, the longevity of the board is also being assessed. As of now, it is Trump's passion project. The day he leaves office, the board could become infructuous. So, Delhi is considering whether to put its time and energy in an initiative which is time-barred – the Trump term will end after another three years. There is also concern that if he doesn't have his way, he may choose to exit the board. That would mean India being stuck on the board, along with its regional partners.

## EXPLAINED

### Why the dilemma

India's dilemma over the Board of Peace has much to do with balancing its long-standing foreign policy principles, especially on multilateralism and the issue of Palestine, against

the strategic benefits of joining an elite global platform, and potential diplomatic fallout with the US if it were to decline the invitation.

Third, India's commitment to the United Nations and multilateralism will be on test if the board tends to undermine the UN framework, and positions itself as a parallel body.

It is also unclear who will take the board decisions, whether it will be consultative or according to Trump's whims and fancies. Delhi will watch out for the rules of engagement.

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Trump, on his part, has added a role for the UN in the board's functioning, but left the mandate wide open. "Once this board is completely formed, we can do pretty much whatever we want to do. And we'll do it in conjunction with the United Nations," he said, adding that the UN had great potential that had not been fully utilised.

Fourth, Delhi is wary that the Board of Peace might wade into other conflicts, beyond Gaza. And Trump's penchant for getting involved – for instance, taking credit for halting the India-Pakistan conflict last summer – is something that worries Delhi.

Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney had said, "The UN resolution, Security Council resolution 2803 references a Board of Peace for Gaza. That's where we see it becoming immediately operative, and it needs to be, in our view, it's better to be designed in that way for the immediate needs there."

India would want Carney's template to be adopted, and limited to Gaza. But Trump has said "this is for the world."

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehzad Sharif was among the leaders who attended the Davos ceremony. There is a view in Delhi that Pakistan's inclusion makes it difficult for India to stay out of the board. Because if it opts out, India will be cut off from any decision-making by the board in the event of a future conflict with Pakistan.

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