

Dead on Arrival? Why Egypt and Jordan Publicly Refuse Trump's Idea to Transfer Gazans

Once again, U.S. President Donald Trump is threatening to shatter seemingly unchangeable pillars of Middle East policy at the wave of a finger.

This time, he seeks to implement what can be observed everywhere around the world – a civilian population being evacuated from a war zone.

Trump's "radical idea" is to move Palestinians from the Gaza Strip to the neighboring Arab countries, which broadly share their culture and language, and never tire of publicly supporting them.

Gazans could be taken to Egypt or Jordan, either temporarily or permanently, while the "demolition site" that is Gaza is being "cleaned out," as the president put it.

However, the principle that Palestinians should not be moved from their homes under any circumstance is among the most passionately held convictions across the region and a central pillar of the "Palestinian cause."

At this moment, we can't be sure whether Trump was aware of the importance of this issue when he first made his apparently, at first, off-handed statements.

The explosive potential of discussing this issue was highlighted when Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, the Palestinian Authority (all U.S. allies) and the Arab League united to stand against Trump in a rare

show of unity.

Trump's plans "threaten the region's stability, risk expanding the conflict, and undermine prospects for peace and coexistence among its peoples," they declared.

"We affirm our rejection of [any attempts] to compromise Palestinians' unalienable rights, whether through settlement activities, or evictions or annex of land or through vacating the land from its owners...in any form or under any circumstances or justifications," the joint statement read.

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Despite this, Trump has since doubled down repeatedly, insisting that Egypt's President el-Sisi and Jordan's King Abdullah II, who are due to visit Trump this month, will come around to his idea in the end.

Despite the many, outraged reactions, neither official statements nor the numerous editorials and think-pieces in the Arabic media discussed the idea on its merits.

Almost no one addressed the fact that the reconstruction of Gaza will probably last at least a decade or offered alternative ideas about what to do with 2 million Palestinians living amid ruins.

Instead, the decade-old mantras of the "Palestinian cause" were repeated everywhere.

El-Sisi said the proposal is "an injustice that we cannot take part in." Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman a-Safadi stated that "Palestine is for the Palestinians and Jordan is for the Jordanians," and asserted Jordan remained opposed to "displacement" of the Palestinians.

However, underneath the uninspired repetition of mantras that Trump seems poised to abolish soon, both Egypt and Jordan have

substantial arguments for opposing the influx of Palestinians, which they usually don't discuss publicly.

Egypt

Two weeks after the Hamas invasion, Egypt's President el-Sisi complained that Israel's military actions in Gaza were an attempt "to force civilian residents to take refuge and migrate to Egypt."

After repeating that the displacement of Palestinians from their land would not solve the Palestinian issue, in a rare admission, he also noted this would "come at the expense of the countries of the region."

If Gazans were forced to flee over the Egyptian border into the Sinai Peninsula, they would surely attack Israel from there, thus endangering the peace with Israel, el-Sisi argued.

In these rare public comments, el-Sisi allowed a glimpse into his (and other leaders') true reason for opposing the entry of Palestinians: The danger to the stability of his military regime.

While he may or may not believe in the necessity of a two-state solution for the "Palestinian issue," el-Sisi is apparently convinced that his population would "protest in their millions," and that the Gazans would risk the strategically important peace with Israel.

In addition, an influx of thousands of Hamas-indoctrinated Islamists would energize the Islamist enemies of el-Sisi's regime. Hamas grew out of a local branch of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, one of the earliest and most influential Islamist groups.

The Brotherhood has always threatened Egypt's military rulers. In 1981, a splinter group of the Brotherhood assassinated President Anwar Sadat for making peace with Israel. Then

following the downfall of Muhammad Hosni Mubarak's regime the Brotherhood won Egyptian elections in 2012.

One year later, el-Sisi overthrew the Brotherhood government and crushed the movement – but he is not about to allow an influx of thousands of Gazans who from early childhood have been brought up on a steady diet of Hamas-style Islamism.

Jordan

Israel's neighbor to the east, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, has had a long, strained relationship with the "Palestinian cause."

The Hashemite royal family was installed in Jordan by the British after it was expelled from the Arabian Peninsula. Until today, the family rules a population of which over half identifies as Palestinian and whose loyalties the king can't fully trust.

Already in 1951, King Abdullah I. was murdered in Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque, which at the time was still in Jordanian hands, for being seen as too cooperative with Israel.

In the following decades, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) established itself within Jordan, growing so confident it attempted to overthrow the king in 1970.

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During the events of the "Black September," Jordanian troops violently suppressed the revolt and expelled thousands of Palestinians, with the PLO fleeing to Beirut.

Only in 1988 did the Jordanian king officially renounce his claims to Judea and Samaria, which had been lost to Israel in 1967, and effectively endorsed the "Palestinian cause" and its demand for a Palestinian state in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza

Strip.

The Jordanian kings have since pursued a policy of public support for the Palestinians while continuing close security cooperation with Israel behind the scenes.

Despite this, the king is constantly under pressure from his people, and the largely symbolic parliament, to “do more” against Israel, for example by canceling the peace treaty that was signed in 1994.

Trump may be trying to force concessions

In Egypt as in Jordan, an influx of thousands of potentially radicalized Palestinians into the country would be an immediate danger to the ruling regime.

For this reason, whatever the public explanations may be, it remains highly unlikely that Egypt or Jordan will allow any transfer of Palestinians to their territory.

However, while Trump has repeatedly bullied other nations into complying with his demands recently, his comments on this issue have so far not been confrontational.

Trump has been known to use controversial statements as “test balloons” to see what might possibly be gained, before zeroing in on his true demands.

He may therefore plan to use public pressure on Jordan and Egypt to force them into other concessions, for example, monetary or military contributions to be used toward the “day after” plans in the Gaza Strip.

This article originally appeared on ALL ISRAEL NEWS, and is reposted with permission.

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