



By: **Harvey Morris**

Will a Trump-Blair New Gaza fiefdom point the way to a Palestinian state?



Is the establishment of an international interim governing body in Gaza a potential answer to the Palestine question? And is former UK prime minister Tony Blair the right man to guide it?

Both questions were raised amid speculation about a 20-point US plan finally **unveiled** this week to end two years of violence in the devastated Palestinian territory and to return it to some version of normality.

Donald Trump told a press conference after his White House meeting on Monday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that Blair would **join** a so-called 'board of peace' that the US president himself would chair.

It is part of a plan in which, for the first time, the Trump administration commits itself to a **solution** that would allow Gaza's two million population to remain in the coastal strip while offering all Palestinians a pathway to statehood.

The priorities for Trump and Netanyahu are to see the release of the final Israeli hostages and to neutralise Hamas, in part via an amnesty for those who recant. Within that context, the issue of governance is perhaps just an afterthought.

Tony Blair's role in a transitional Gaza plan

Is the latest peace plan just another scheme that will yet again kick the can of Palestinian statehood further down the road? Are the Palestinians to be eternally groomed for a statehood that never comes?

Gaza would be administered by a temporary, transitional government of Palestinian technocrats responsible for meeting the daily needs of its inhabitants.

They, however, would be supervised by a new international body established by the US in consultation with Arab and European partners.

That's where Tony Blair comes in.

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Although the former PM's name had previously not been officially associated with the plan, he was said to have played a key role in promoting it through his established links with the Trump White House.

His proposal for a Gaza International Transitional Authority, with him leading it, reportedly had the **support** of Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, and Steve Witkoff, his Middle East envoy, at a White House meeting Blair had with the president at the end of August.

An architect of the latest road map?

Although many of Blair's ideas appear to have been incorporated into the latest White House plan to end the Gaza war, there are already questions about what role it accords to the Palestinian Authority that exercises partial, if nominal authority over areas of the West Bank.

Israel's liberal daily Ha'aretz, revealing a draft of what it called Tony Blair's Gaza plan, **wrote** this week that it proposes a regime "run by affluent foreigners with Palestinian executives at the bottom".

Other critics denounced the plan as a neo-colonial enterprise to impose foreign rule on the Gaza Strip. Jeremy Corbyn, the former UK Labour leader, **posted** on X: "It is not up to Blair, Trump or Netanyahu to decide the future of Gaza. That is up to the people of Palestine."

Separate foreign-led governance of Gaza, however temporary, would reaffirm its isolation from the West Bank, itself increasingly under siege by expanding Israeli

settlements.

Whatever the virtues and failings of Blair's blueprint and the US's 20 point-plan, they are a considerable advance on a scheme previously floated by Trump. That envisioned displacing the strip's entire population to make way for a so-called 'Gaza Riviera' of high-tech megacities to be placed under a US trustee administration.

"It has never been about relocating Gazans, which is a proposal TBI has never authored, developed or endorsed" - Tony Blair Institute (TBI)

Although the ex-PM's London-based Tony Blair Institute (TBI) became incidentally associated with the Riviera plan - its staff was included in message groups on the project shared by consultants and Israeli businessmen - the think tank insisted:

"It has never been about relocating Gazans, which is a proposal TBI has never authored, developed or endorsed."

It may be that Blair actually managed to talk the White House down from a Trump initiative that was widely ridiculed and condemned internationally.

The latest proposals will rely on Arab partners to spur investment and keep the peace in what the Trump plan calls New Gaza. He may envisage a reworking of his Riviera plan, one that this time keeps the local population intact.

Blair might now claim to be an architect of the latest road map from the White House. But does that make him the logical choice to oversee a central role in its implementation?

The Trump-Blair 'board of peace'

On one level, history is against him. For many

in the Middle East and beyond, his reputation as a thrice-elected Labour prime minister is inexorably linked to his support for the US-led 2003 invasion of Iraq.



The Quartet and Blair's leadership of its East Jerusalem office were frequently criticised by Palestinian officials for being ineffectual

Subsequent negative views of him in the region and beyond did not, however, prevent him being appointed envoy of the so-called Middle East Quartet in 2007 soon after he resigned his premiership.

Established by the United Nations, the United States, Russia and the EU in 2002 in response to the outbreak of the second Palestinian intifada two years earlier, the Quartet's mission was to take practical steps to promote the Palestinian economy and safeguard the possibility of a two-state solution.

The Quartet and Blair's leadership of its East Jerusalem office were frequently criticised by Palestinian officials for being ineffectual. They viewed Blair as too sympathetic to the Israelis, who, in turn, were accused of blocking progress.

Over two decades, the Quartet's plans have come to naught. There are limited grounds for optimism that the Trump-Blair 'board of peace' will not suffer the same fate.