



By: Sharmila Devi

Palestinians overlooked as New Gaza vision evolves



Donald Trump's **Board of Peace** will hold its first meeting in Washington next week, but little is known about who exactly will attend or what it will discuss beyond fundraising for Gaza's reconstruction.

Permanent membership of the board costs \$1 billion - a sum that could contribute enormously to rebuilding Gaza. Only about 25 countries have signed up so far, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Hungary, whose prime minister, **Viktor Orbán**, is the only confirmed attendee next week. No Western European country has yet joined.

Progress is likely to remain slow on alleviating Gaza's continued dire humanitarian situation, let alone striking ground to build the glitzy new skyscrapers presented by Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, as part of his "**New Gaza**" vision revealed in Davos last month.

A ceasefire still holds in Gaza, although Israeli interpretation of the accord means it has continued its military strikes, with more than 550 Palestinians and four Israeli soldiers killed since last October.

Alongside the Board of Peace, which evidently seeks to compete with the United Nations on the international stage, several institutions have been established specifically aimed at Gaza.

The National Committee for the Administration of Gaza is meant to provide stabilisation, but its members are stuck in **Egypt** because Israel has refused them permission to enter the territory.

An American military-led co-ordination centre in Israel opened in October to draft plans for the demilitarisation and reconstruction of Gaza, but little has been revealed so far.

Meanwhile, **Indonesia** this week became the first country to publicly commit up to 8,000 soldiers to the International Stabilisation Force for Gaza, whose exact mandate and composition still remain unclear.

Saudi Arabia and Jordan have declined to send

troops under any circumstances, and the second country expected to commit troops is Morocco, said the FT.

"Privatisation of occupation" underway in Gaza

Gaza remains split, with Israel controlling borders and outposts and Hamas the populated areas. At least 11 children have died of hypothermia since the ceasefire, while up to 20,000 Palestinians are waiting for permission to leave Gaza for urgent medical treatment.

But Washington still appears focused on treating **Gaza** as a real estate problem. The "privatisation of occupation" is underway to generate profits for Israeli and allied firms, Ihab Jabareen, a researcher specialising in Israeli affairs, told Al Jazeera.

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"Reconstruction is a chain of indirect profits," he said, adding that the logistics of security inspection, the security firms managing Gaza's crossings, and the insurance companies covering the risks will all provide opportunities for revenue.

One company that might be eyeing future opportunities in Gaza is Dezer Development, a real estate company founded by a dual Israeli-American citizen and run from Florida.

It emerged last week that it operated two deportation flights of Palestinians from the US to Israel using private jets that can cost up to \$26,000 per flight hour, The Guardian and +972 Magazine reported.

Gil Dezer, who now runs the company, is known to be a Trump family friend, and he donated more than \$1 million to Trump's presidential campaign.

“Burying the idea of a Palestinian state”

While Gaza simmers, Israel is expanding its powers in the West Bank aimed at “burying the idea of a Palestinian state,” **Bezalel Smotrich**, Israeli finance minister, said on 8 February after a cabinet meeting.

The meeting approved measures including the abolition of a provision that prevented Jewish private citizens from buying land in the West Bank and giving Israeli authorities greater powers to carry out demolitions of Palestinian property.

The Palestinian foreign ministry condemned the moves as “de facto annexation of Palestinian land” and called on Trump to intervene.

Since the start of January this year alone, nearly 700 Palestinians in nine West Bank communities have been displaced by settler attacks, says the UN

The White House says it opposes Israeli annexation of the West Bank, but such a move remains the goal of ultranationalists such as Smotrich, who have ratcheted up the pressure on Netanyahu as he seeks re-election later this year.

Since 2022, Israel has dramatically expanded settlements in the West Bank and increased land seizures and demolitions without any censure by the Trump administration.

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Rights groups alarmed over reported death penalty plans

Israeli and other human rights groups are also

sounding the alarm over plans reported by Israeli media that the Israel Prison Service is preparing to enforce a **death penalty law** against Palestinian prisoners.



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Executions would be carried out by hanging, and the law would first be applied to members of Hamas who took part in the 7 October 2023 attack on Israel.

A delegation from the prison service is due to visit an unnamed East Asian country to study the implementation of the death penalty, according to the reports.

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Kushner’s “New Gaza” PowerPoint presentation at Davos contained Arabic spelling mistakes, underscoring that no Palestinians were consulted, pointed out a European Council on Foreign Relations post.

It described the Board of Peace’s governance structure, including private investment funds with real estate interests, as a “recipe for kleptocratic oligarchy”, and it said European leaders were right to stay away.

“The board’s purpose, governance and financial entanglements risk legitimising a system in which loyalty and money outweigh international law,” it said.