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The Cradle's Palestine Correspondent

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Can Egypt rebuild Gaza without forcing Palestinians out?

As Gaza lies in ruins, Egypt is pushing a massive Arab-backed reconstruction plan—one that keeps Palestinians in place rather than displacing them. But with Hamas facing internal rifts, Israel tightening its grip, and Trump pushing his own agenda, can Cairo pull it off?



Photo Credit: The Cradle

"Whoever failed to stop the war in Gaza or deliver aid as it should have been, cannot be relied upon today to save Gazans from displacement or to secure an agreement in their favor. But we are forced to smile at Arab regimes, to navigate the four harsh years of Donald Trump, and to avoid an imminent social explosion inside Gaza." – Sources within Hamas, speaking to *The Cradle*.

This sentiment reflects the political reality Hamas is dealing with, as explained by sources who prefer to remain unnamed due to the sensitivities involved. Unlike previous conflicts, this war has seen a reliance on off-the-record statements from Palestinian, Israeli, and even US sources rather than official declarations.

It is within this context that remarks made by Hamas political bureau member Mousa Abu Marzouk to [The New York Times](#) can be understood. His statements, which were later denied, did not just include expressions of regret over Operation Al-Aqsa Flood but also raised the possibility of abandoning armed resistance.

[The Wall Street Journal](#) took it a step further, suggesting that Hamas's external leadership was considering distancing itself from the Gaza-based leadership due to their differing approaches. Whether this signals a real internal divide within the movement or is part of a strategic effort to manage the international and regional backlash triggered by Trump's return to the White House is unclear.

What is certain, however, is that a more immediate issue is now at play—the [Egyptian-Arab plan](#) for Gaza's reconstruction, an initiative that is being framed as an alternative to Trump's "Riviera" proposal to [displace Gazans](#). The key question is whether Trump will accept it.

Egypt's role in rebuilding Gaza

Egypt is at the center of this plan, given its direct border with Gaza, which makes it the primary stakeholder when it comes to both security and economic concerns. Arab countries are working with Cairo to push the initiative forward, aiming to secure international backing while preventing a scenario that would see another *Nakba* with Palestinians being forced out of their land.

Efforts are underway to organize a reconstruction conference that will include broad European participation, with plans to begin the first phase of rebuilding. According to Egyptian sources cited in Arab media, the approach is to reconstruct Gaza while keeping its residents in place.

The plan divides the territory into three humanitarian zones, each containing a large camp where displaced families will be provided basic necessities, including water and electricity.

To accommodate those who have lost their homes, thousands of prefabricated housing units, including caravans and upgraded tents, will be introduced in designated safe areas for a six-month period.

This will happen in parallel with debris removal, though the occupation state is currently blocking these efforts. Those backing the plan are working to ensure that the volume of aid

trucks entering Gaza is restored to pre-war levels, with fuel and construction equipment included.

The scope of the reconstruction effort

The plan is expected to be funded through a combination of Arab and international sources, with around fifty multinational companies specializing in construction and urban planning involved. The goal is to build secure housing units within a year and a half across the three designated zones in Gaza.

One possibility under discussion is the creation of an Arab-led reconstruction fund, with suggestions that it could be named the “Trump Fund for Rebuilding Gaza.” [Reuters](#) has also reported that the plan includes a proposal to establish a buffer zone along the border between Gaza and Egypt to prevent the construction of tunnels, alongside the removal of rubble and the establishment of twenty temporary housing areas.

The Egyptian Engineers Syndicate has already [announced](#) its readiness to contribute to the effort, forming an advisory committee to develop a high-level technical strategy for reconstruction. The syndicate’s chairman, Tarek el-Nabrawy, emphasized that the initiative will be carried out in cooperation with the Arab Engineers Union and could take anywhere from three to five years to complete, depending on the level of international support.

Given the scale of destruction in Gaza, hundreds of companies, engineering firms, and alliances from Egypt, the Arab world, and beyond will be needed to execute the project.

The implementation of the plan follows a structured approach. The first priority is the removal of rubble, with some of the debris set to be recycled for construction purposes. This will be followed by the development of essential infrastructure, including water and sewage networks, electricity, desalination plants, and communication lines. Only once these foundational elements are in place will the urban planning phase begin, leading to the construction of homes, schools, healthcare facilities, and cultural centers.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) – [favored](#) by the US and Israel to replace Hamas in governing Gaza has also presented its own reconstruction plan. At a cabinet meeting in Ramallah on 18 February, Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa outlined a two-phase approach.

The first phase, expected to last three years, carries an estimated cost of \$20 billion and will focus on emergency interventions. The second phase, for which no timeframe has been set, will emphasize large-scale reconstruction and is projected to cost at least \$33 billion dollars, based on UN assessments.

Behind the scenes: Cairo’s strategic calculations

Beyond the official announcements, additional details have emerged from sources speaking to *The Cradle*. These sources reveal that Egypt's reconstruction plan involves multiple parallel tracks, with the first phase alone expected to take between three and five years.

This timeline was determined based on detailed maps provided to Cairo from various sources, which have guided planning efforts within the Egyptian armed forces' Engineering Authority. Experts have been consulted to estimate the time and resources required for implementation, ensuring that the plan remains feasible.

Egypt has historically viewed Gaza as a security issue above all else. One retired Egyptian general describes it as a region that has been "rebellious" since the time of Muhammad Ali. Even when Egypt governed Gaza between the 1950s and 1967, relations between the Egyptian military and the local population were often fraught.

The administrative unit that once managed Gaza during this period still exists in Cairo's Nasr City, operating under military intelligence, where it maintains a vast archive on Gaza and its inhabitants. Its employees remain on the government payroll, a sign that Egypt has always kept the possibility of reclaiming control over Gaza in mind, even after the Oslo Accords and the establishment of Palestinian self-rule.

Housing and infrastructure

In terms of execution, the plan prioritizes the deployment of prefabricated housing units in well-organized clusters that will allow Gaza's social structure to remain intact. The war has severely disrupted extended families that traditionally live near one another, and the new housing arrangements aim to restore these connections.

Over time, these temporary homes will be replaced with more permanent structures, depending on what Israel allows to enter Gaza. Meanwhile, efforts will be made to replace damaged tents with higher-quality alternatives for those still living in emergency conditions.

As reconstruction advances, additional housing units will be introduced in areas where they can be accommodated. Egyptian authorities have already identified specific locations for rubble clearance, including sites in both northern and southern Gaza.

This stands in contrast to Israel's preference for focusing rebuilding efforts in the south. Eventually, new residential buildings will be developed, forming self-sustaining urban blocks designed to meet basic living standards. The entire process, however, will be subject to Israeli approval, as no elements of the reconstruction will be permitted to have any military function. The project remains in its early stages, particularly as discussions continue over where construction will take place. Coastal areas are being considered as an option, given their relative safety and viability for long-term habitation. However, reconstruction efforts for

schools, universities, and other non-essential institutions are expected to proceed at a slower pace.

The final hurdle: Political survival

Egypt is actively engaging with both the PA and Hamas to address issues related to compensation, housing designs, and the resettlement of displaced families. The objective is to create new residential clusters that reflect the social and cultural fabric of Gaza, while ensuring that landowners are fairly compensated.

At present, the Rafah crossing continues to operate under wartime restrictions – with the PA reportedly having [assumed control](#) of the border in early February. Goods entering Gaza must first pass through Israel’s Kerem Shalom checkpoint for inspection, where many shipments face delays or outright rejection.

The number of aid trucks allowed into Gaza has been capped at six hundred per day, a slight increase from the pre-war level of five hundred. Israel has also blocked the entry of certain materials deemed to have potential military applications, including durable tents reinforced with metal rods.

For Egypt, this project is not just about rebuilding Gaza—it is a strategic move to maintain influence, secure Persian Gulf funding, and avoid being side-lined in a post-war political reshuffle. For Hamas, it is a test of its political resilience.

For Israel, it is an opportunity to reshape Gaza while keeping security tight. For Trump, it is a challenge to his own plans. The plan’s success depends on maintaining a fragile ceasefire and securing sustained international cooperation.

With occupation forces still present along the Salah al-Din corridor, tensions remain high. Any miscalculation—whether in Cairo, Ramallah, or Washington—could derail the entire initiative.

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