

Israeli Intel Ministry Suggests Relocating Gazans to Sinai After Hamas War

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Among a number of suggestions in a new document drafted by Israel's Intelligence Ministry is the possible relocation of the population of the Gaza Strip to Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, in the current war's aftermath.

The document suggests that Israel might initially relocate the population of the Strip to tent cities to be followed later by the establishment of permanent communities in northern Sinai.

The document presents two additional alternatives for the future of the Gaza Strip that do not include population transfer. One would permit the Palestinian Authority, which has partial control of the West Bank and which was ousted from Gaza by Hamas in 2007, to control Gaza with its current residents remaining. Another option would have Israel establish "local Arab rule" by Gaza's residents who remain in their homes after the collapse of the Hamas regime.

The U.S. has publicly and privately opposed such plans. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken called it a "non-starter" after his shuttle diplomacy immediately after October 7, and Joe Biden affirmed to Egypt President Abdel Fattah al-Sissi that "Palestinians in Gaza are not displaced to Egypt or any other nation" as recently as this weekend.

The war erupted on October 7 after <u>Hamas attacked Israeli border communities</u>, killing 1,400 people.

As first reported by Israel's Hebrew-language Local Call website, the option of settling Gaza's population in northern Sinai includes a buffer zone of several kilometers that would prevent Gazans from approaching the Israeli border.

The Intelligence Ministry confirmed the existence of the document, but a source familiar

with the drafting of it said the cabinet isn't expected to debate the proposal and that the Intelligence Ministry is not the government entity that would be responsible for such decision-making.

Sources at the ministry minimized the importance of the document. But it is initial evidence that Israeli government officials are examining exit strategies after Israel's goal of ending Hamas' rule in Gaza is achieved. The document acknowledges that the relocation of the population of Gaza would not gain international legitimacy but claims that it would reduce the number of casualties among Gaza's population.

Following Hamas' October 7 attack, Israel has responded with massive aerial bombing of Gaza City in the north of the Strip and elsewhere as it seeks to eliminate Hamas as a military force and to remove it from power in Gaza. Israeli authorities have urged the population of the north of the Strip to move south.

"More than 1.4 million people across Gaza have fled their homes, nearly half crowding into UN schools and shelters, following repeated warnings by the Israeli military that they would be in danger if they remained in northern Gaza," The <u>Associated Press reported</u> on Sunday.

The Prime Minister's Office said in response for this article: "This is an initial document of the kind that can be found in dozens of iterations at all levels of the government and the security services. The issue of 'the day after' has not been discussed at any official forum in Israel, which is now focused on eliminating Hamas' governmental and military capabilities."

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