



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on January 2, 2024

Israeli Minister Suggests Depopulation of Gaza

Most Palestinian Arabs living in Gaza should be encouraged to emigrate to other countries, Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said on December 31.

Considerable measures are necessary to guarantee Israel's security and prevent further incursions by Hama, he contended.

"What needs to be done in the Gaza Strip is to encourage emigration," Smotrich, who is leader of the Religious Zionism party, told Army Radio. "If there are 100,000 or 200,000 Arabs in Gaza and not 2 million Arabs, the entire discussion on the day after will be totally different."

Smotrich posited that a depopulated Gaza would no longer be a threat to Israel, as the Palestinians living there under Hamas' rule are "growing up on the aspiration to destroy the state of Israel."

"Most of Israeli society will say 'why not, it's a nice place, let's make the desert bloom, it doesn't come at anyone's expense,'" Smotrich said, as cited by Reuters. He proposed that an international resettlement plan should be implemented for the Palestinians who "have been forcibly held against their will in a ghetto for 75 years" and have been raised on anti-Israeli sentiments.

On December 30, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reinforced that "the war will continue for many months until Hamas is eliminated and the hostages are returned."

Israel declared war on Hamas and allied groups after the Palestinian terrorist group invaded southern Israel on October 7, killing around 1,200 people and taking more than 200 hostages. More than 21,600 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since tensions escalated, according to the local Hamas-run government.

Up to 1.9 million people — or more than 85 percent of Gaza's population — have been displaced since the Israeli Army began its retaliation for the Hamas attacks, as per figures from the UN.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) initially asked people to leave the northern part of the Palestinian enclave, and ultimately told those remaining in the southern city of Khan Younis to relocate farther from the area of combat operations.



AP Images
Bezalel Smotrich



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For its part, Israel continues to rebuff calls for an immediate ceasefire, despite constant warnings from the UN about a humanitarian “catastrophe” in the enclave. Israeli officials and the IDF state that Hamas should take full responsibility for civilian deaths, slamming the militant group for employing civilians as human shields.

On December 30, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel aims to take full control of the Gaza-Egypt border zone, arguing that this is the only way to achieve the “demilitarization” of the Palestinian enclave and prevent cross-border attacks.

Speaking at a press conference in Tel Aviv last weekend, Netanyahu predicted that “the war will continue for many more months,” notwithstanding international calls to cease hostilities.

The Israeli leader outlined plans to fully eradicate Hamas and free all Israeli hostages, pledging to ensure that Gaza no longer poses a threat to Israel and that there will be “no element in it that finances terrorism, educates its children for terrorism and pays the families of terrorists.”

Netanyahu elaborated that there are “additional important missions” meant to restore security in the Israeli cities and settlements devastated by the brutal Hamas attacks.

“The Philadelphi Corridor — or to put it more correctly, the southern stoppage point [of Gaza] — must be in our hands. It must be shut. It is clear that any other arrangement would not ensure the demilitarization that we seek,” he declared.

“As prime minister, I have rejected the international pressure aimed at stopping the war before we achieve these goals,” Netanyahu continued. He also lauded the United States for authorizing the “supply of additional war materiel” to the IDF.

Netanyahu did not provide more details on whether he plans to put Gaza under exclusive Israeli control after years of disengagement, after the unilateral withdrawal of Israeli security forces in 2005. Nonetheless, he has reinforced that he will not permit the Palestinian Authority, which governs the West Bank but not Gaza, to take charge of the besieged enclave after the war.

Netanyahu’s remarks came days after South Africa filed an appeal before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague, slamming Israel for allegedly committing “genocide” against the Palestinian population in Gaza.

South Africa’s filing claimed that “acts and omissions by Israel ... are genocidal in character, as they are committed with the requisite specific intent ... to destroy Palestinians in Gaza as part of the broader Palestinian national, racial and ethnic group,” slamming the Israeli government for breaching its obligations under the UN’s Genocide Convention.

The filing seeks “provisional measures” to safeguard against “further, severe and irreparable harm” to Palestinians in Gaza, including, but not limited to, a ceasefire and the cancelation of any orders meant to deprive Palestinians of food, water, shelter, fuel, medical supplies, or other humanitarian needs. Those found to have been involved in “direct and public incitement to genocide” must also be penalized, the filing added.

In a statement on December 29, the Israeli Foreign Ministry dismissed “with disgust” South Africa’s claim that it is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.

The ministry condemned allegations that its actions in Gaza were “genocidal in character” as “baseless,” labeling the claim an anti-Semitic “blood libel” and blasting South Africa for working with Hamas.



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“South Africa’s claim has no factual and judicial basis and is a despicable and cheap exploitation of the court,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Lior Haiat said, adding, “South Africa is collaborating with a terror group that calls for the destruction of the State of Israel.”

Haiat lashed out at Hamas for the “suffering of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip,” insisting that the terrorist group is “using them as human shields and stealing humanitarian aid from them.”

“Israel is committed to international law and acts in accordance with it, and directs its military efforts only against the Hamas terrorist organization and the other terrorist organizations cooperating with Hamas,” he continued, maintaining that “Israel has made it clear that the residents of the Gaza Strip are not the enemy, and is making every effort to limit harm to the non-involved.”



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