

Trump's Gaza Vision:  
Rethinking Hungary's  
Relations with Israel and  
the Middle East

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### Abstract

*This paper analyses Hungary's foreign policy on the Israel-Palestinian conflict and the potential impact of US President Donald J. Trump's Gaza plan. While Jerusalem is Budapest's main ally in the Middle East, Hungary's Connectivity strategy, which aims to maintain good relations with countries and blocs around the world, does not exclusively encompass the State of Israel. A clear sign of successful relationship-building in the Middle East is that the only European Foreign Minister who was present at the signing of the Abraham Accords was Hungary's Péter Szijjártó. Budapest's other regional partners like Turkey, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates oppose Donald Trump's plan to solve the Gaza crisis. Thus the implementation of such an idea poses several potential risks on Hungary; as an example it could damage the relations with a variety of stakeholders in the Middle East. The authors of the present paper trace the historical evolution of Hungary's stance on Israel-Palestinian relations, noting a transition from alignment with Arab states during the Soviet era to a position of neutrality after regime change and ultimately to strongly pro-Israel policies under Viktor Orbán. They also illustrate how the Hungarian government strives to build good relations with all regional actors, resulting in economic and political benefits. The paper argues that it is not in Budapest's interest to become actively involved in regional dynamics, as taking a definitive stance on local issues could jeopardise its relations in the region. The study further explores Hungary's broader diplomatic goals and strategies. Although the current government often plays the role of a 'black sheep' within the European Union, the country's voice on the global stage has notably increased in recent years. The authors also discuss how Trump's new peace approach could significantly impact Hungary's Middle Eastern policy, particularly its key initiative, Hungary Helps, which aims to assist persecuted Christians.*

**Keywords:** Benjamin Netanyahu, bilateral relations, cooperation, Donald J. Trump, foreign policy, Gaza, Hungary, Hungary Helps, ICC, Israel, Palestine, Viktor Orbán

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## Introduction

Since the inauguration of Donald J. Trump as the 47th President of the United States, significant shifts in global dynamics have been set into motion. When the newly elected President first referred to the United States' northern neighbour as the 51<sup>st</sup> member state of the USA and titled the Prime Minister of Canada as '*Governor*', many were smiling. However, the tone darkened when Donald J. Trump announced that the Panama Canal would be 'taken back' and Greenland, for national security reasons, would go under US jurisdiction. And most recently, when the US President, after his Oval Office meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister, envisaged a luxury resort to replace the bombed-out Gaza Strip, the Arab world was shocked and united in its outrage. Washington's recent interest in acquiring lands has become a worrying issue of world politics, especially in the shadow of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Is the US President merely playing with words, or can there be more than that? Is it possible that he is only testing the world, listing international reactions and confusing other actors of the international system? But what if he is serious? Is it possible, in the 21st century, that the United States will start pursuing a policy of territorial acquisition? If so, it will have unforeseeable consequences for the globe, especially for its smaller, weaker countries. In our paper, we are examining what a 'Trump Gaza', the birth of a new Mediterranean 'riviera' built on land planned to be included in any future Palestine State, could mean for Hungary, a relatively small country in Central Europe, but one that has been standing on Trump's side since his first run for office.

## Hungarian Foreign Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Hungary is the conservative bastion of the Old Continent. As a member of the EU and NATO, it upholds and manages a sovereign foreign policy, which has transitioned from the 'dare to be small' philosophy, a response to the historical setbacks of the last century, to a comprehensive, principle-based, nation-rooted system of encounters. A one-word summary of Hungary's foreign policy is *connectivity*. The term sounds simple, however, maintaining it is far from that. Connectivity refers to collaboration, partnership and synergy. Cooperation is based on specific objectives; reaching a deal is its central principle. Budapest has pursued this strategy for a decade while becoming increasingly criticised by its European partners. Such a policy is unique within the European Union and unpopular, too, especially in a time when the EU's bureaucratic leadership tends to decide whom to make good relations with and whom to cut ties. Hungary refuses to follow such instructions but instead judges each situation on its merits. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who first took office in 1998 and has been leading the country with a constitutional majority since 2010, has often articulated that neither allied countries nor Brusselian bureaucrats are entitled to change the foreign relationships of any member state.

The Hungarian governmental strategy is based on several pillars, the most important of which are sovereignty, national economy and strict immigration policy. In all three areas, there is a strong convergence with what Donald J. Trump aims to achieve in the USA. A specific reflection of the Hungarian concept of sovereignty can be observed in

the country's immigration policy. Hungary welcomes and respects tourists arriving from every segment of the world. However, it reserves the right to allow temporary or even permanent residence only in cases when it is useful, valuable and safe. For ten years now, Hungary has been in conflict with all those—be they the big EU states or supranational organisations—who favour uncontrolled immigration. Budapest is holding out but at a heavy price. As the country is situated on the external border of the European Union, it safeguards not only its people but also everybody within the Schengen Area. Hungary vehemently refuses the policy of open borders: No one is allowed to enter the country without proper identification and a clear statement of the purpose of arrival. Hungary has already built a wall on its southern border, similar to what Donald J. Trump started to set up during his first presidency. Western criticism in this regard is difficult to understand, as it is in no one's interest to have an unidentified mass of people flowing across the EU's external borders. It is not baseless to state that conformity to various ideologies in Europe tends nowadays to override common sense.

Operating a national economy is also a sovereignty issue for Budapest. As a landlocked country without vast energy resources, Hungary desperately needs to uphold the energy deals it has negotiated on a market basis. Energy in Central Europe traditionally comes from the East. Not for ideological, but for historical, technical, and monetary reasons. Maintaining the Eastern treaties is a neuralgic point with Western Europe. The EU leadership claims to be doing its utmost to cut economic ties with the Russian Federation, even though the bloc spent €21.9 bn on Russian fossil fuels in the third year of the February 2022 invasion.<sup>[1]</sup> The Connectivity policy can mean that the Hungarian government makes friends around the world while losing friends in its own neighbourhood. The Middle East has been proven an excellent arena for practising such positive relationship building. Hungary's goal is to be on good terms with Israel and the states in its region. In addition, Budapest aims to establish economic partnerships and enhance cooperation. Last but not least, a key goal for Hungary is to help the Christian communities in the region.

### **Hungary's Relations with Israel and Palestine Before Orbán**

The relationship between Hungary and Israel showed different faces during the bipolar Cold War era. The two countries established diplomatic relations in 1948; however, the Six-Day War brought an end to them. As part of the Soviet Bloc, Budapest aligned with Moscow's Middle East policy and, from the 1960s to the 1980s, sent industrial and military support to the so-called 'friendly' Arab states. The Palestine endeavours became important for Hungary when Yasser Arafat, the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), visited Moscow in 1970. Following the Soviet leadership's direction, Hungary had to deepen relations with the PLO to ensure the flow of goods and people between the two actors.<sup>[2]</sup> Not long after that, with the international recognition of the Palestinian organisation, it opened its office in Budapest in 1975.<sup>[3]</sup> The Malév Flight 240 disaster, which happened at the time of the opening, became a symbol of the illegal arms shipments between the Kádár regime and its 'friendly' Arab governments and organisations. The catastrophe occurred on 30 September 1975, when a Hungarian Airline Tupolev Tu-154 crashed into the

Mediterranean Sea near Beirut, and 60 people died. The cause of the crash is unclear; some theories state that the aircraft was shot down or that there was an act of sabotage on board.<sup>[4]</sup> At that time, Hungary possessed considerable arms manufacturing capacities and functioned as one of the Warsaw Pact Organisation's key suppliers of military technology to the Third World. The violation of international law was covered by using civilian aircraft of the Hungarian Flight Company, also called 'Kalashnikov flights', to deliver weapons to the Middle Eastern countries.<sup>[5]</sup> Although Hungarian diplomatic ties with Israel after the Six-Day War were cut down, this did not mean the cessation of every connection between the two countries. Trade relations with Israel brought Western foreign currency to Hungary, and the Israeli Communist Party also received financial support from the Hungarian government.<sup>[6]</sup> Among other things, Hungary imported farm equipment, electronic devices, household refrigerators, steel pipes, industrial diamonds and exported mechanical equipment, electric motors and other electrical goods. The trade volume reached 7 million dollars on both sides in 1966. The Bank of Israel made increased dollar deposits with the Hungarian National Bank, that helped to ease Hungary's foreign exchange shortage.<sup>[7]</sup> However, the Hungarian acts couldn't be called balancing tactics in the Israel-Palestine issue. Since Hungary's decisions had to align with Moscow's order, and the Hungarian weapon support for Syria in the 1973 Yom Kippur War showed that till the collapse of the Soviet Union, Israel could not be a 'friendly' state for Hungary.

The democratisation process in Hungary in the late 1980s showed a tactic to balance relations with Israel and Palestine. Hungary recognised the State of Palestine following its 1988 Declaration of Independence.<sup>[8]</sup> The removal of Janos Kádár, Hungary's veteran Communist leader, from power in 1988 was a turning point in the diplomatic relations between Hungary and Israel. Under the leadership of Gyula Horn (who became the third prime minister after the regime change), Hungary restored its diplomatic relations with Israel on 18 September 1988, thus becoming the first Eastern Bloc country to fully reestablish ties with Israel.<sup>[9]</sup> The first Prime Minister of the newly born Hungarian Republic, József Antall, concluded Hungary's standpoint on the Israel-Palestine issue in the following years of the regime change, saying: 'Zionism can be accepted as the philosophy of the Jewish people's self-determination and state-building, but at the same time, we have been and continue to be in favour of respecting the Palestinian people's right to self-determination as well.'<sup>[10]</sup> The freshly democratized Hungary's main aim was to separate itself from Soviet influence and adapt to Western ideas. In this framework, Budapest's assistance to Soviet Jewish immigrants was a key aspect in the reconstruction of the relations with Jerusalem. Hungary allowed Soviet Jews to pass through its territory on their way to Israel and provided humanitarian support to those in transit.<sup>[11]</sup>

Successive Hungarian governments took a neutral stance on the Israel-Palestine issue. They aligned with EU policies, supporting the international community's negotiations between the two countries and voicing the importance of the success of the Middle East peace process. During the premiership of Ferenc Gyurcsány (2004-2009), the Hungarian government supported the international community's efforts to advance the peace process, emphasising the importance of a two-state solution that ensures Israel's security and the Palestinians' right to self-determination. In 2005,



Hungary joined the action program established under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which included cooperation with both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. This aimed to strengthen political dialogue and develop regional economic relations. According to the former PM Gyurcsány, 'the solution for the conflict is an agreement rather than war, and both the people of Israel and the Palestinians have the right to seek their prosperity.'<sup>[12]</sup>

### **Hungary-Israel Relations Under the Orbán Government**

Hungary's main ally in the Middle East is Israel; overall, the relationship between the two countries is strong and durable. There are also minor disputes between the two countries. These are primarily historical issues, such as disagreements about the role of Miklós Horthy, Hungary's Governor for most of the Second World War, during the Hungarian Holocaust. Orbán's friendship with Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, goes back to 2005 when the two leaders first met. This encounter made a significant impact on Orbán's Middle East policy. His personal visit to Israel in 2005 was part of the tactic to defeat anti-Semitic accusations that had become part of a leftist campaign against the Fidesz party at that time. Before the meeting, Orbán had named Netanyahu's party an ideological partner for Fidesz since the most common thing in both leaders' political careers was that they both faced strong left-wing headwinds and led their parties to victory.<sup>[13]</sup>

From a diachronic perspective, some parallels can be found between the geopolitical situations of the two countries. This was mainly true for the twentieth century, when Israel was constantly forced to fight for survival in a circle of highly hostile countries and under constant lethal threats. Hungary had to endure similar pressure a bit earlier in time because of the Little Entente, an alliance made by several Central European states in the 1920s that had received territories from the Kingdom of Hungary. Budapest is now allied with its former enemies in NATO and the European Union.

Hungary's relations with the Jewish state Hungary have been strong for decades, providing a defence against the accusations of anti-Semitism that occasionally hit the Hungarian nation, usually from Western Europe. While old stereotypes still endure among a minority, Hungary is now considered one of the safest countries in Europe for Jewish people, and its government repeatedly emphasises its zero tolerance for anti-Semitism. That this is not just a catchy, sellable slogan but a high-profile policy is confirmed by the fact that the Israeli national football team, temporarily displaced from its homeland due to the war situation in the Middle East, chose Hungary as the venue for its international matches. Jewish culture flourishes in the country, and Hungary's most prestigious art workshop, the University of Theatre and Film Arts, which celebrates its 160th anniversary this year, is launching a Hebrew-language class for the first time in its history in September 2025.<sup>[14]</sup> Hungary also showed its strong support to the State of Israel during its hardest days when the former Hungarian president, Katalin Novák, participated in a solidarity service in the Dohány Street Synagogue four days after the terrorist attack on October 7.<sup>[15]</sup> There were solidarity protests not just in Budapest but across the country.<sup>[16]</sup> The fact that the two countries

are not only cultural but also political allies is clearly demonstrated by the fact that Hungary has tended to vote in favour of Israel in the UN since 2010.<sup>[17]</sup> In 2024 Yair Netanyahu, son of Israel's prime minister, confirmed in an interview with the Hungarian news portal *Mandiner* that 'Hungary has always stood up for Israel in the EU and the UN'.<sup>[18]</sup> When the International Criminal Court in November 2024 decided to issue an arrest warrant on charges of war crimes<sup>[19]</sup> against the Israeli Prime Minister, Hungary immediately declared that it did not agree with the decision. Viktor Orbán demonstratively invited Benjamin Netanyahu to an official visit to Budapest, assuring the Israeli leader in advance that he would not be arrested. Just as Netanyahu arrived on April 3 2025, Hungary announced that it was leaving the ICC, dealing a further blow to the beleaguered court.

### **Hungarian Position on the Israel-Palestine Issue Before October 7**

As said earlier, the main goal of Hungary's current foreign policy strategy is relationship building and international cooperation. The name of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade clearly shows that the exploitation of political and economic opportunities in foreign relations takes place in parallel, hand in hand. The notion of connectivity is a realisation of network-based thinking that opposes bloc formation, exploiting and implementing synergies between all the possible geographical directions. However, continuing such a policy is a complex task, as today's main geopolitical actors are building blocks around themselves based on the principle of 'with us or against us'. This attitude presents a challenge for Budapest. Despite difficulties, as a member of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Hungary has successfully manoeuvred on numerous occasions to avoid complete unilateral commitment, building strong relations with Washington, Beijing, Moscow and Jerusalem.

Orbán's return to the prime minister position in 2010 brought balancing tactics in Hungary's official Middle East policy, emphasising the need for immediate peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict that must serve both Israel's security and regional recognition and the creation of an independent, democratic, and viable Palestinian state<sup>[20]</sup> which fully aligns with the European Union's commitment to a two-state solution.<sup>[21]</sup> At that time, the Orbán government stressed that Hungary had been supporting the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for self-determination and independent statehood for decades. As a supporter of the two-state solution, the second Orbán government was in favour of ensuring Israel's security and establishing a sovereign, independent Palestinian state that lives in peace with its neighbours, promoting the negotiations between the two parties with the international community's assistance.<sup>[22]</sup><sup>[23]</sup> The third Orbán government continued its previous official standpoint, stating in 2016 that 'violence must be stopped, direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine must begin with the help of the international community, and the two-state solution must be realised.'<sup>[24]</sup>

In his first term in office, US President Donald J. Trump's radical Middle East policy strongly impacted Orbán's strategy in the region. A couple of months after Trump's



recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and the US Embassy's move from Tel Aviv, the Hungarian government, although it had openly not recognised the Holy City as its capital, increased its diplomatic presence there by opening a foreign trade office in 2019. Orbán emphasised the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the renewal of Hungarian-Israeli diplomatic relations at that time and described the decision as enhancing collaboration between the two countries in innovative technologies.<sup>[25]</sup> The Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Péter Szijjártó, also welcomed Trump's Middle East Peace Plan in 2020, stating, 'Hungary highly appreciates the American mediation efforts and every initiative that could bring us closer to a solution.'<sup>[26]</sup>

### **The Terrorist Attack and its Impacts on Hungary's Position on the Israel-Palestine Issue**

The terrorist attack carried out by Hamas on 7 October 2023, followed by the Israeli military response, sealed the fate of the Gaza Strip and its population. Gaza is a historical area that covers 363 square kilometres on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>[27]</sup> Throughout its history, the former oasis and trading centre has been under the rule of numerous peoples and nations. After the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, it came under Egyptian authority, and in the Six-Day War, Israel conquered it.<sup>[28]</sup> In 2005, in a matter of good faith, Israel withdrew from the area, displacing its population living there. In the 2006 local elections, however, Hamas came to power, an organisation whose declared goal was to dismantle Israel's Statehood.<sup>[29]</sup> Over the past nearly 80 years, Gaza's population has increased tenfold, with a population density of 6024 people per square kilometre in 2023 (almost 2.3 million in total).<sup>[30]</sup> Since the nineties, Israel has imposed severe restrictions on the movement of goods and people in and out of Gaza. Citing UN data, all these constraints contributed significantly to the fact that the economy of the area has not developed to the expected extent.<sup>[31]</sup> The area's status quo was shattered by the surprise attack launched by Hamas on 7 October 2023, in which 1,139 people, including 695 civilians (including 36 children), 373 security force personnel, and 71 foreigners were killed,<sup>[32]</sup> and another 251 were kidnapped by armed terrorists.<sup>[33]</sup> Several of them have not returned home to this day. In response to the terrorist attack, Israel launched a retaliatory action of unprecedented force against Hamas, the local military groups and terrorist cells. The operation took place on a military level, under the direction of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). As a result, a significant part of the residential area was destroyed. According to data used by Time magazine, most likely from the Palestinian Ministry of Health, by March 24 2025 more than 48,000 residents of the Gaza Strip have been killed, and the number of injured individuals has exceeded 110,000.<sup>[34]</sup> However, the Israeli Defence Force's data are different. The Israeli army has eliminated around 14,000 terrorists in Gaza since 7 October 2024.<sup>[35]</sup> During the operation, 407 Israeli soldiers were killed, excluding those who died on October 7 itself.<sup>[36]</sup>

Since the International Criminal Court believes that Israel's extensive response to the unprecedented terrorist act may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes, the body has issued arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

and Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant and a Hamas commander.<sup>[37]</sup> The International Criminal Court is not an organ of the United Nations; however, it can launch investigations related to alleged war crimes committed on the territory of or by a state that is party to the ICC or which has accepted its jurisdiction.<sup>[38]</sup> The Palestinian authority supports the warrants issued against Netanyahu and Gallant. However Israel denies that the ICC has jurisdiction over its actions, and also notes that Palestine is not a properly constituted state. To date, no state has complied with the execution of the arrest warrant issued. Poland did make verbal threats<sup>[39]</sup> to arrest Israel's prime minister if he stepped on Polish soil, but it later withdrew that threat.<sup>[40]</sup> In any case, Netanyahu did not attend the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp.

After 7 October 2023, Viktor Orbán strongly expressed his support for Israel and, based on the two countries' cooperation against terrorism, the Hungarian prime minister highlighted Israel's right to self-defence against terrorists, adding that 'the success of counterterrorism operations is not only in Israel's interest but also in the interest of the entire international community.'<sup>[41]</sup> Hamas' terrorist attack changed the public dialogue about the reality of the two-state solution, not just in Israel, which impacted the Hungarian leadership's communication. The Orbán government stopped promoting the previously numerous times supported idea and urged the international community to participate actively in decreasing the escalation of the war in the region.<sup>[42]</sup> Hungary's active support to Israel after 7 October has been visible in opposition to the European Union's calls for a ceasefire from Israel<sup>[43]</sup>, sanctions against Jewish citizens from the West Bank<sup>[44]</sup>, warning Israel against launching an offensive in Rafah<sup>[45]</sup>, and an arrest warrant for Netanyahu by the International Criminal Court.<sup>[46]</sup> From the Palestinian side, although Hungary maintains diplomatic relations and has its representation office in Ramallah, following Hamas' attack in October 2023, the Orbán government did not allow sympathy rallies supporting organisations like the Palestinian Hamas in Hungary. Furthermore, Hungary voted against Palestine's UN membership in the following year.<sup>[47]</sup> The Hungarian government does not officially condemn the two-state solution, but since October 7, the Orbán government has adopted a policy of silence on this matter.

### Trump's Gaza Plan and Its Reception

The US, as the leading power in the multipolar world, has a crucial role in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Achieving something significant in solving the territorial dispute between the Arab and Israeli nations has always been part of almost every American president's career. Jimmy Carter's role in the Camp David Accords, George H.W. Bush's role in the Madrid Conference, Bill Clinton's role in the Oslo Accords, and Donald Trump's role in the Abraham Accords are just a few examples to justify this. Or Yissachar, the Head of the Research Department for Israel's Defence and Security Forum, describes the shift Donald Trump's presidency brought in the US's foreign policy towards the Middle East to the Danube Institute<sup>[48]</sup> as 'seismic'. According to Yissachar, the US President 'focuses on endgames, out-the-box thinking and win-win situations, yet the administration can also clearly distinct good and evil, fundamentally

characteristic of its political philosophy, in a way other administrations have not always done.'

We argue that Donald J. Trump has always taken a hard line in his Middle East policy. As it is the region where 'showing power' is essential for achieving geopolitical objectives, the US president acted according to this philosophy in his first term. His 'maximum pressure' policy on Iran aimed to weaken the Persian State economically by cutting off its oil exports and implementing other sanctions to induce Iran to accept a better deal about its nuclear program. The second term of Donald J. Trump has reinstated his policy on Tehran, which is inevitably connected to the President's way of solving the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza since Iran is one of the key sponsors of the terrorist organisation. He outlines the renewal of the policy in 2025 in his memorandum: 'Iran remained the world's leading state sponsor of terror and has aided Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis, the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and other terrorist networks' that poses a threat not just for the United States but for its partners, like Israel. Trump states that Tehran's nuclear program 'poses an existential danger to the United States and the civilised world'.<sup>[49]</sup>

The Gaza issue has become a central element in Trump's Middle East policy. Solving it offers him the opportunity to continue along the lines of those presidents who achieved something great in establishing peace in the Middle East. However, his recent Gaza Plan risks profoundly destabilising the region. Its implementation would weaken Iran's position in the area since it would lose one of its partners on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, but as a paper published by Chatham House, a London think-tank, argues, 'a US takeover of Palestinian land would renew the legitimacy of Iran's proxies across the region'.<sup>[50]</sup> The risks of the possible chaos in the Middle East by implementing Trump's Gaza Plan sparked a massive backlash in the Arab world<sup>[51]</sup>, including US allies. The two most affected countries, Egypt and Jordan, which made peace with Israel decades ago, both rejected the proposal firmly, stating concerns about regional destabilisation and the forced displacement of Palestinians from their homeland. They also fear that Israel wouldn't allow the Palestinians to return and that a mass influx of refugees could once again destabilise the region, as it did in the decades following 1948, which contributed to Lebanon's civil war and led to Israel's two invasions of that country. Furthermore, both countries already have struggling economies that would make it difficult to absorb large numbers of people. Trump also suggested that wealthy Gulf states could pay to resettle the Palestinians, but that also appears unlikely. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar have also joined Egypt and Jordan in rejecting Trump's plan. In September 2024, the Saudi official statement by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman stated that Saudi Arabia would not normalise relations with Israel without establishing a Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Kingdom said its 'unwavering position is non-negotiable and not subject to compromises'.<sup>[52]</sup> The Palestinian Authority and Iran have also made similar statements on the subject. US Senator for Maryland Chris Van Hollen from the Democratic Party, in a press release, called Trump's plan 'ethnic cleansing'.<sup>[53]</sup> The United States has the leverage of using tariffs and aid cutoffs to pressure both its allies and adversaries and could apply economic pressure on Egypt and Jordan, which have long relied on American aid; however, Egypt has warned that

any mass transfer of Palestinians into the Sinai Peninsula bordering Gaza could undermine its peace treaty with Israel — which is a cornerstone of regional stability and American influence for nearly a half-century.<sup>[54]</sup> In response to Trump's plan, Arab leaders met in Saudi Arabia to develop a joint strategy for Gaza. The countries unanimously rejected the idea of relocating Gaza's population to their countries. At the meeting, Egypt presented its own plan, which would result in Gaza being governed by a politically independent but legally subordinate government of experts under the Palestinian Authority, without Hamas participating in it. The biggest challenge, however, is finding funds for reconstruction, which the UN estimates will cost \$53 billion.<sup>[55]</sup>

However, reacting to President Trump's Gaza plan, Yissachar highlighted that allowing Gazans to leave according to Trump's proposal would be a 'first step' toward securing Israel's future. 'Laying a real alternative to the failed Two State Plan is long overdue, and there is a real majority among Israelis for the plan to allow Gazans to live elsewhere. Moreover, we believe according to polls and the situation on the ground that a majority of Gazans are interested in having that option, rather than being Hamas' prisoners.' The Israeli researcher added that he has 'no doubt, as do many in Israel, that most Gazans are direct collaborators of Hamas and supportive of its policies, therefore allowing them to live far from the Jewish State will contribute directly to its security.' Moreover, 'over the course of the war, the Israeli coalition and opposition united to pass a resolution rejecting the premise of a Palestinian state with a landslide majority.'

Additionally Yissachar added that "Palestinians can have civil self-governance around the territories, but Israel must preserve a major swath of the territory, especially the strategic areas critical to its security, and maintain freedom of operation for counterterrorism purposes.' Yissachar concluded by stating that the 'world must unite against Iran' as it is 'the chief sponsor of terrorism in the Middle East' and should 'rethink the Palestinian issue while striving toward interest-based peace with Saudi Arabia and other Sunni nations is key to stabilizing the war-torn Middle East.'

### **Trump's Gaza Plan and Its Possible Effects on Hungary**

Trump's Plan for Gaza can seriously affect Hungary's position in the Middle East and could trigger a new wave of migration that is more of a hazard than a benefit. As said earlier, after the regime change, Hungary has always supported the Israeli-Arab peace process, regardless of what government was in power. Every elected prime minister has emphasised the importance of peace in the Middle East. It is highly symbolic that the sole European foreign minister invited to attend the signing of the Abraham Accords was Péter Szijjártó.<sup>[56]</sup> According to Máté Szalai<sup>[57]</sup>, researcher at the Clingendael Institute, in the context of Trump's Gaza plan, it's important to remember that Hungary recognises Palestine as a state. Moreover, the implementation of the two-state solution through the creation of a viable and democratic Palestinian state is still Budapest's official policy'. Szalai emphasised that Trump's Gaza plan directly contradicts this goal as the forced displacement of more than two million Palestinians from Gaza and an



American-led economic expansion in the Strip would make Palestinian self-determination impossible in the foreseeable future. Trump's plan not only opposes Hungary's official policy but also violates key international legal frameworks and threatens both European and Hungarian security. Szalai pointed out that forcing Palestinians out of Gaza and into other Arab countries would likely fuel radicalisation and create social conditions that facilitate the growth of extremist groups. He also added that relocating two million Palestinians to Arab states could destabilise their internal security, particularly in Jordan and Egypt, which contradicts the fundamental interests of Hungary and Europe as a whole.

Although the Hungarian government does not oppose the two-state solution, in recent years, it has stopped promoting it loudly, and with Trump's Gaza plan also chose the policy of silence. This step, however, carries significant risks, as the Arab states have still not given up on the idea of the creation of a Palestinian state and have made it clear that they will not contribute in any way to the displacement of the Gaza population. It is obvious to everyone that the contradiction between the two positions will not be resolved by Budapest.

As Máté Szalai noted, 'Although Hungary is a minor player in the region, the implementation of the Trump plan would threaten its ability to maintain connectivity with multiple stakeholders. It is important to remember that besides Israel, other countries in the region, including Turkey, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, are important partners for Budapest. All of them reject Trump's proposal. Szalai also pointed out that in shaping Hungary's position on Gaza, it would be advantageous to consult with these actors, as well as European allies, who hold greater influence in the situation. 'Through direct and indirect ways, the implementation of the Trump plan would indeed contribute to further migration from the Middle East to Europe. Washington's stance currently does not represent a pathway to stability, to say the least. Therefore, it is difficult to consider it beneficial for Hungary in any way. The implementation of Trump's plan, which holds the potential to destabilise the region, also carries the risk of having a meaningful impact on Europe and Hungary. The European Union, instead of the US president's plan, welcomed the Arab Recovery and Reconstruction Plan presented at the Cairo Summit on 4 March 2025 to solve the problem by Arab states and not by Donald Trump.<sup>[58]</sup> The Hungarian government did not take a position on this question; the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade only emphasized Hungary's interest in solutions that bring peace and stability to the Middle East.<sup>[59]</sup> In Máté Szalai's interpretation, the implementation of Trump's solution 'poses risks without meaningful potential benefits. Even leaving vital political and security considerations aside, any kind of economic opportunity emanating from reconstruction in Gaza – whichever plan is implemented – would be undermined if certain security and political conditions are not met.

From this perspective, it is important to identify the exact political role Trump's plan plays. As Szalai Máté pointed out, 'there is currently a debate among experts whether the plan should be taken seriously or whether it serves "only" to incentivise Arab states, especially those of the Gulf, to take a bigger responsibility in the management of Gaza. The realisation of the second option, namely the implementation of broader Arab cooperation concerning Gaza, would be in our interest, too, especially compared to the



alternatives (the Trump plan and the continuation of the status quo). That being said, even if it is a rhetorical tool, the announcement of the Gaza Riviera plan has already caused significant political damage.'

Thus, Hungary, as a minor player in the Middle East whose best position is to maintain its connectivity strategy in the region, will probably continue its persecuted Christians helping program called Hungary Helps<sup>[60]</sup> and urge the international community to assist people in need locally to prevent mass migration towards Europe.

### **The Situation of the Christian Minority in Gaza**

Christianity in Gaza dates back to the 4th century when monastic communities by St. Hilarion were established. The oldest church still active in Gaza is the Saint Porphyrius Greek Orthodox Church, named after Porphyrius, who was a 5th-century bishop of Gaza. The church site is regarded as one of the three oldest churches in the world and predates Islam's arrival in the region. Many of Gaza's modern Christians are descendants of the Arab Christian communities from Mediterranean coastal cities, such as Joppa. They came to Gaza when they became displaced following the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. More than 80 per cent of Gazan Christians belong to the Greek Orthodox Church; around 100 Roman Catholics are a part of the Latin parish of the Church of the Holy Family, and the remaining are a part of the Baptist/Protestant church of Gaza. Despite being a small religious minority in a volatile region, Gaza's Christian community have had a significant impact on Gaza's educational, medical, and business sectors.<sup>[61]</sup>

In 2005, Israel withdrew from Gaza under the Disengagement Plan Implementation Law passed in the Israeli Knesset, following which various Palestinian political blocs competed for power, with Hamas taking control in 2007. Gaza's Christians have suffered through five major conflicts between Hamas and other armed militant groups and Israel in 2008-09, 2012, 2014, 2021, and now 2023.<sup>[62]</sup>

Since Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, there has been repeated violence against the Gazan's Christian community. Between 2007 and 2011, there have been several acts of vandalism and bomb attacks on Christian schools, homes and institutions, as well as cases of murder. Additionally, a Canadian NGO confirmed that towards the end of 2009, members of Hamas repeatedly desecrated Christian graves and exhumed the bodies to "decontaminate" the soil from the corpses of Christians as they believe they're unworthy of burial on Palestinian land. According to the same source, Hamas also forced members of the Christian minority to collaborate with the terror organisation, as they intimidated them with threats of rape and reprisals against their families.<sup>[63]</sup> The years since 2007 to the present, sadly, have seen a sharp decline in the Christian population, even though the rapid increase in Gaza's population during the same period. In 2007, the Christian population was estimated to be around 3,000 people; however, by 2023, it had decreased to fewer than 1,000 in the region, out of a total population of over 2 million.<sup>[64]</sup> Today, displaced Christian families are facing an unprecedented crisis: they lack homes, food or clean water. Therefore, if the present situation continues, Christianity could cease to exist in Gaza.<sup>[65]</sup>

### The Unique Model of Hungary Helps

The Hungary Helps Program aims to ensure adequate government-level responses to the growing trend of Christian persecution, including that occurring in Gaza. As more Christian communities are getting closer to extinction and the situation of persecuted Christians is getting worse year by year, we argue that the international community should follow the example of Hungary when it comes to prioritising giving aid to the most persecuted religion in the world. As Paul Coleman wrote in his article on Spiked, 'The persecution of Christians has intensified, and the silence of Western leaders continues to be deafening. There is no international outcry. There are no grand foreign-policy initiatives. There are no emergency summits.'<sup>[66]</sup>

To address these crises, 'the Hungarian government donated \$400,000 to the Patriarchate through the Hungary Helps Program to help the civilian victims of the crisis in Gaza and other parts of the Holy Land. Hungary is also providing additional support for the preservation of Christianity in the Holy Land, the preservation of holy places, churches, and the life of faith,' State Secretary Tristan Azbej said at the beginning of 2024. The State Secretary also highlighted that 'When Hungary helps, it starts from what the suffering people need. This means food and medicine that directly saves lives in the Gaza conflict, on the one hand, and financial aid on the other.'<sup>[67]</sup>

### How Would Trump's Gaza Plan Affect Middle-Eastern Christians?

For Juliana Taimoorazy, the founder and president of the Iraqi Christian Relief Council, a leading international advocate and 2021 Nobel Peace Prize nominee, the effect of Trump's Gaza plan on Middle-Eastern Christians would likely be negative: *'Although I understand the reasons behind President Trump's remarks on Gaza, the aftermath could lead to further suffering of Christians throughout the Middle East.'* Taimoorazy raised attention to the fact that Christian refugees from Iraq and Syria are living in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey in a dangerous situation. 'After escaping the horrors of ISIS and Islamist persecution, these families now face a new problem: The potential mass migration of Gazans to their host countries.' Regarding the effects President Trump's plan could have on persecuted Christians, Ms Taimoorazy noted: 'Growing up in an environment shaped by Hamas' extremist ideology has indoctrinated many Gazans with hostility toward Christians and Jews. By intensifying sectarian tensions, exhausting already few resources, and strengthening Islamist organisations, their arrival could further marginalize the area's dwindling Christian population.' She added that 'If safeguards for Christian refugees are not offered, this strategy could accelerate the eradication of Middle East Christianity from its historic homeland.' Ms Taimoorazy highlighted that 'In the past, Christians in the Middle East have been perceived as Western puppets and have suffered anytime Muslim communities are enraged by Western actions.' She warned that if Trump's strategy is seen as an ethnic cleansing of Gazans backed by the West, 'Christians in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan could be exploited as scapegoats for Muslim rage.'

## Conclusion

In our paper, we presented the situation in Gaza, President Trump's stated plans for the enclave and subsequent policy challenges from the Hungarian perspective. Hungary's approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict has undergone several changes in the past decades, and President Trump's Gaza plan can signal the next turning point. The regime change in 1989 was a landmark in Hungary-Israeli relations, and from then on, a more pragmatic and balanced Middle East foreign policy characterised the Central European country's behaviour. Viktor Orbán, just like the newly elected Donald J. Trump, has been a sterling friend of Israel. Although the Hungarian government considered the importance of the establishment of an independent, peaceful Palestinian State as a key point in the Middle East peace process, the savage events of 7 October 2023 challenged this concept. The Orbán government did not officially announce its opposition to the two-state solution, but the Hungarian leadership does not mention it as a key aim for the crisis. Instead, the peace in the region and Israel's right to protect its citizens were emphasized by Hungarian officials. Budapest's main interest is the peace in the region, and the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade stated that Hungary would support any solution- including Trump's plan for Gaza- if it brings calm and stability.<sup>[68]</sup> Turning away from the two-state solution, however, could seriously jeopardise the country's connectivity policy in the Middle East. Hungary still views peace as the most essential goal in the region and has been taking an active role in helping people in need there. Through the Hungary Helps Program, the Central European country contributed to the saving of lives in the Gaza conflict by providing food, medicine and financial aid. Officially, the program helps persecuted Christians. Although there are less than 1000 Christians in Gaza who are counted as second-class citizens, Hungary is dedicated to helping every person who suffers from the ongoing conflict. At the same time, Budapest stands for Israel's right to self-defence in the Israel-Palestine conflict and sees its success against terrorism as necessary for the whole international community. Although Hungary is a minor player in the Middle East, the Central European country can be highly affected by the consequences of the US Middle East policy. The implementation of the Gaza Plan by Donald Trump could bring another immigrant crisis to Europe or impose an economic burden on Hungary's Middle Eastern partners. It is evident that the President's current plan for Gaza barely has benefits but more risks for Hungary. It can damage Hungary's well-built connectivity strategy in the region, which aims to be a bridge between the East and the West and to promote trade, investment, and technological development. Hungary, as a small country in the international system, has aligned with Trump's administration on issues like border security, nationalism, scepticism toward multilateral institutions, and conservative values. In the future, Budapest is more likely to align with the President's ideas if he continues with similar interests. The silence behind the Orbán government in the case of Trump's Gaza plan can be explained in two ways. First, like many experts, Budapest also sees the President's possible solution as a tool of power politics, which is never going to happen. Second, the Orbán-government and the Trump administration have a good relationship, and in this connection, Hungary is the weaker party that would continue to support the stronger party to enjoy its assistance even if the more powerful actor makes decisions that contradict its interests.

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