

Israel adopts plan to conquer and occupy Gaza, in a shift for war's goals

Israeli military leaders say the plan could threaten the lives of the remaining hostages.

By [Ben Sales](#) May 5, 2025



A military helicopter flying above the Gaza Strip, as it seen from the Israeli side of the border, on Jan. 8, 2024. (Tomer Neuberg/Flash90)

Israel's government approved a plan on Sunday to conquer and occupy the Gaza Strip, a major expansion of its military campaign there and a sign that the war is far from ending.

The plan passed unanimously in Israel's cabinet despite warnings by the country's military chief that it will endanger the lives of the hostages still held by Hamas. It will also trigger an extensive call-up of military reservists, many of whom have already served for extended periods during the war.

The plan was approved alongside a new structure for delivering humanitarian aid, which Israel has blocked from the Gaza Strip since it ended its ceasefire with Hamas in March. Israel says the new aid plan, in which couriers will deliver boxes of food to individual families, will minimize the risk that Hamas will commandeer the aid. But U [rejected the plan in a statement](#), saying it "contravenes fundamental humanitarian principles."

The plan marks a new stage in the 19-month war. Until now, Israel has fought Hamas and destroyed large swaths of Gaza but has not announced its intention to remain there

indefinitely. But lately Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has stressed the need for a decisive victory and recently framed it as a higher priority than returning [the 59 remaining hostages, up to 24 of whom are thought to still be alive](#).

[Netanyahu's wife Sara](#) and [U.S. President Donald Trump](#) each said last week that they believed fewer than 24 Israeli hostages remained alive.

Last week, Ron Dermer, a cabinet minister and close Netanyahu confidant, [said the war](#) would last another year.

“Wars are won decisively,” Netanyahu [said in a video](#) posted to his social media ahead of the vote. “We’re not giving up on that... We have not finished the war. We will finish it. We will achieve full victory in Gaza.”

The plan has received applause from Netanyahu’s far-right partners, who have long encouraged the strip to be depopulated of Palestinians as well as the establishment of Israeli settlements there. It sparked concerns from the Israeli military’s chief of staff, Eyal Zamir, who reportedly told the cabinet, “Take into account, in the framework of a broad military maneuver, we could lose the hostages.”

More than 50,000 people have been killed in Gaza since the beginning of the war, a number that includes soldiers and civilians, according to authorities in Gaza’s Hamas-run government. Hamas’ Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel killed 1,200 people, and hundreds of Israeli soldiers have been killed in Gaza since then.

The plan also flies against promises by Trump that he would bring the war to an end as president. More recently, he has backed Israel’s prerogative to prosecute the war as it sees fit. But the new military operation is not due to begin until after Trump’s visit to Israel next week.