

The Yellow Line in Gaza: A De Facto Division of the Strip?





The term “yellow line” has entered the political lexicon describing the current reality in Gaza, following its appearance in former U.S. President Donald Trump’s ceasefire proposal. The plan, accompanied by a map outlining Israeli withdrawal, includes a yellow line marking the areas to which the Israeli military would redeploy during the initial phase of the agreement.

Over time, this line has become central to developments in the besieged Strip, where Israel now controls roughly half the territory. The Israeli army has used the yellow line as a launchpad for daily assaults, blocking residents from returning to their homes and stifling efforts to restore life amid the ruins.

The true danger, however, lies not in the army’s positioning itself along this line, but in its gradual evolution into a long-term reality. According to the U.S. plan, any Israeli withdrawal from this line hinges on the deployment of an “international force” and the issue of “disarmament” an open-ended, non-binding prerequisite that offers no measurable guarantee for withdrawal, thus making this more than a mere roadmap for a phased military exit.

This de facto partition revives the notion that Israel’s war on Gaza is far from over. The current reality suggests an Israeli strategy of solidifying geographic and demographic changes that align with far-right Zionist visions rather than security

concerns. This positions half the Strip toward possible futures as either a buffer zone or a neutral area open for Israeli development and settlement.

A Pause Without a Timeline

Trump's plan (with notable Israeli amendments) outlines a three-stage Israeli withdrawal process:

Phase One (Yellow Line): Immediate ceasefire and Israeli redeployment to designated areas, in exchange for Hamas releasing all remaining captives.

Phase Two (Red Line): Deployment of an International Stabilization Force (ISF) to monitor security, accompanied by further Israeli withdrawal.

Phase Three (Security Buffer Zone): Final withdrawal to a defined border, with governance transferred to an international administrative authority during a transitional period.

With the agreement's implementation, Israel conducted a significant redeployment, pulling back to the yellow line and concentrating forces in the zone between this line and Gaza's eastern border with Israel. This area spans roughly 210 square kilometers, about 53% of Gaza, according to Israeli government spokesperson Shosh Bedrosian.

Due to the yellow line, residents of Rafah, eastern Khan Younis, eastern Gaza City, Beit Lahia, and Beit Hanoun have been unable to return home. Israeli firepower also extends well beyond the yellow line, violating the ceasefire agreement.

The transition to the second phase is not bound to clear political benchmarks but instead to conditions that allow Israel to prolong its presence indefinitely. This lack of a timetable ensures the permanence of Israeli military presence under the guise of a temporary measure.

In a telling statement, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Channel 14 that Phase Two hinges on the disarmament of Hamas or more broadly, of the entire Strip: "Only when this is complete, whether through easy means or hard, will the war be over."

Such framing links any further withdrawal to two contentious and unresolved issues: disarmament and the efficacy of the international force. The American position remains fluid, Israel seeks to use the force to achieve its war goals, and regional actors like Egypt, Qatar, and Turkey echoing Palestinian resistance reject disarmament and define the international force strictly as a buffer, not an enforcer.

This detachment from concrete timelines transforms the so-called temporary

yellow line into a potentially permanent feature, echoing Israel's past pattern of making temporary arrangements permanent through unilateral facts on the ground.

Field Demarcation and Strategic Encroachment

A Wall Street Journal report from a press visit to the yellow line with Israeli forces fueled suspicions that the line could become a permanent division between eastern and western Gaza. Journalists observed Israeli troops digging trenches, reinforcing barriers, and setting up infrastructure that bisects the Strip.

Israeli military officials were quoted as saying the yellow line may serve as a defensive position for the foreseeable future. On the ground, the line has been marked with yellow-painted concrete blocks and metal signs. Daily Israeli attacks aim to prevent residents from resettling in these areas.

Palestinian reports reveal that violations extend 600 to 1,500 meters beyond the yellow line into territory marked as cleared. Israel has also erected new yellow concrete cubes 400 to 1,050 meters west of the official line.

Despite the ceasefire, bulldozing and demolition operations continue east of the buffer zone, erasing what remains of urban infrastructure. According to the BBC, over 1,500 buildings have been destroyed beyond the yellow line, and satellite imagery suggests this number could be far higher.

France 24 journalist Noga Tarnopolsky, after touring the area with the Israeli military, described the terrain east of the line as a wasteland: "just piles of rubble." She noted the near impossibility of identifying the exact location of the yellow line, highlighting the fluidity of Israeli control.

Netanyahu has also used the yellow line as a bargaining chip. According to Israel's Kan broadcaster, the Prime Minister is considering shifting the withdrawal boundaries if Hamas does not return the bodies of Israeli soldiers.

Two Gazas?

Trump's ambiguous plan and the conditional Palestinian approval pending internal deliberations and Arab-Islamic coordination have allowed Israel to manipulate the ceasefire into a framework for continued aggression, potentially entrenching the yellow line as a new border.

Although former Israeli Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer denied that the yellow line would become a permanent border, saying, "If Hamas fails to meet its obligations, Israel will reduce the yellow zone. If others meet the obligations, we'll expand it," this does little to reassure observers of Israeli intent.

Meanwhile, U.S. rhetoric has shifted toward "model reconstruction" of parts of

Gaza cleared of Hamas presence. During a visit to Israel, U.S. Vice President JD Vance stated: “If Hamas refuses to disarm, we’ll start rebuilding only eastern Gaza.”

Accompanied by Jared Kushner, Vance promoted the idea of constructing “a new Rafah,” with funds directed toward the Israeli-controlled zones, offering Palestinians “a safer place to live away from Hamas.”

Reuters confirmed this growing division. Six European officials involved in implementation efforts told the agency that reconstruction would likely be confined to Israeli-controlled areas, warning of a long-term de facto division.

Jewish Insider also reported that pro-Israel experts support this division, viewing the Israeli-controlled east as a way to isolate Hamas. David May of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies remarked: “Since ceasefire lines in the Middle East often become permanent borders, Israel must plan for the yellow line becoming a long-term boundary.”

Reuters echoed this concern, citing 18 sources six of them European officials and one former U.S. official who believe the yellow line is becoming Gaza’s indefinite dividing line, absent major U.S. intervention.

Persistent Threat, Delayed Response

Palestinian resistance has yet to decisively address these developments. However, both Israeli and American actions suggest Kushner’s vision may already be influencing real-world policy.

Moreover, Israel is reportedly maintaining ties with proxy militias operating east of the yellow line groups intended to serve as a local enforcement tool in a future Gaza restructured in Israel’s image. This scenario evokes parallels with South Lebanon in the 1980s and 1990s, when an Israeli-backed militia managed territory until Israel’s withdrawal in 2000.

For now, Palestinian factions are navigating the flawed American proposal by making strategic concessions and seeking regional leverage to counter irreversible changes to Gaza’s status.

However, the effectiveness of this approach remains uncertain, especially as the so-called ceasefire increasingly resembles a shift in the tools and tempo of aggression one that sustains Israel’s campaign of displacement and destruction under the veneer of diplomacy.