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GAZA

Trump on The Gaza War: Melville, MacArthur, and Mice in Gaza

Trump's Gaza plan reframes counterinsurgency—removing civilians to expose Hamas, bypassing strongholds, and enlisting allies to finish the job, ensuring no Hamas resurgence.

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The war in Gaza has long been deemed an unwinnable quagmire, a struggle in which any military success for Israel comes at the cost of massive civilian casualties. Too many for any Western nation to bear, and certainly for Israel, which faces intense scrutiny for its actions. Hamas, deeply embedded within the urban landscape, operates as a shadow force under the cover of civilian infrastructure. In response to this conundrum, Donald Trump has put forward an unconventional strategy—to remove the Gazans from Gaza. The world has mistaken it solely as a "real

estate deal" or "political solution." Rather, it is a military strategy—one that moves beyond traditional counterinsurgency methods to an approach resembling literary, historical, and natural precedents. His military strategy, as we surmise, consists of three core elements—Trump's three M's of Gaza: Melville, MacArthur, and Mice.

Melville: The Relocation Gambit

Herman Melville, the American novelist best known for *Moby Dick*, would seem an unlikely source for tackling an insurmountable task. Rather than let his presidency yield another Ahab against the whale of the Israel-Palestine conflict, his Gaza strategy looks to Melville's short story *Bartleby, the Scrivener*. Melville tells the tale of an office worker who simply refuses to comply—he "prefers not to." Intractably so. Rather than force him into submission, his employer and colleagues simply relocate, leaving him behind to his own fate.

Although it may be that Hamas wishes Israelis to "relocate," Trump has turned the tables on the tunnel-hiding group. Rather than engage Hamas in a protracted and bloody urban battle, the civilian population—the cloak shielding Hamas—is moved out of harm's way. This is no new strategy. Hamas has succeeded in employing the civilian population in its war effort through Israel's own desire not to kill them.

Trump's relocation changes the environment of the current battlefield. Unlike Israel's current struggle of trying to separate terrorists from noncombatants through slow and costly urban clearance, Trump's clean sweep of civilians out of Gaza renders Hamas exposed and vulnerable. Like Bartleby, Hamas' stubborn resilience will be its undoing. Just as Bartleby's proximate colleagues bear the burden of his intransigence, so do the Gazans who refused to remove Hamas from power now too, which will help isolate it.

MacArthur: Island-Hopping the Enemy

Next, Trump takes a page many of us learn in daily "life—"pick your battles." But he isn't the first American to do so on the world stage. In the Pacific theater of World War II, Generals Douglas MacArthur and Chester Nimitz developed a strategy of "island hopping"—bypassing heavily fortified enemy positions and instead striking at their weak points, isolating Japanese forces until they withered on the vine.

Thus, Trump's plan circumvents the need for any immediate direct confrontation by depriving Hamas of its environment and its host population. The goal is not to fight them tunnel-by-civilian-protected tunnel, but to remove their ability to wage war from the shadows. Unlike Japan, which ultimately required atomic force on its

civilian population *en masse* to be subdued, Trump offers an alternative: evacuate civilians and leave Hamas in a barren, exposed wasteland, or underground, awaiting their fate.

If the group continues to resist, it will do so without its protective cover. If they do so to stop the relocation, they will have been drawn out, leading to Trump's final ploy.

Mice: Hunting the Remnants

Upon evacuation, many civilians will not leave, either out of loyalty to Hamas, fear, or sheer obstinance. If Trump has seemed "more Catholic than the Pope" in his support for Israel with the Gaza Plan, embedded in the plan is a deep critique of Israel. Herein lies Trump's claim to Gaza as an American spoil. The Israelis have been nothing short of standard-setting when it comes to their conduct of care for civilians while attempting to root out Hamas. But, by the same token, they haven't shown the strategic ability to do what America was willing to do in World War II in Japan—achieve surrender. Hamas and Western mores have nullified it absent massive cost.

Nonetheless, the world can see that Hamas still exists and its numbers may not have shrunk much even with 20,000 plus dead among its prior ranks.

Trump has an innate understanding not to "bring a knife to a gun fight." But it is only the "enlightened" West that can both believe in its own moral superiority and be outmatched by others with its own values as a weapon.

Trump's approach isn't expected to treat Hamas as in some form the superior armed group, but rather as those who have been defeated before. One doesn't bring in an elephant to hunt a mouse, but a mouse hunter. That's why Trump's plans have included receiving the help of regional powers and Arab nations, both unsympathetic to groups like Hamas and with the experience of eradicating militant Islamists. The Emiratis, for instance, have long rejected the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots, such as Hamas.

Trump's strategy, therefore, relies on enlisting regional partners to help in the final phase: a house-to-house cleansing operation where Hamas operatives are rooted out and eliminated—much like a cat hunting mice. Unlike Israel, which has historically lacked the political will or logistical capacity to fully occupy and secure Gaza, Trump's approach appears to favor a total reset of the territory, ensuring no return of Hamas.

A Strategy to Win, Not a Political Play

While the world debates the implications for the past's noble approach of the "two-state solution," Trump is speaking in the language of war, not diplomacy. His approach acknowledges the reality that Hamas cannot be defeated without massive civilian casualties—unless those civilians are first removed. Trump's own ambivalence about temporary versus permanent relocation is a feature, not a bug of the plan. In essence, he has proposed a war plan that renders Hamas powerless while avoiding the kind of catastrophic death toll that fuels further radicalization.

When an enemy cannot be convinced to surrender and has embedded into the urban terrain, it is historically common to attempt to get civilians completely out of harm's way to prevent the defender from using them as human shields. This was the case in many urban battles such as Aachen, Fallujah, Marawi, and Mosul. Removing civilians from the battlefield not only reduces collateral damage but also deprives the enemy of leverage—both as human shields and as a means to manipulate international condemnation. In Gaza, however, due to Egypt's border policies, civilians could not be moved completely out of harm's way, allowing Hamas to exploit them as part of its primary strategy. Moving the civilians is the most humane and practical way to dismantle Hamas, end their continued attacks against Israel, and alleviate the suffering of the population trapped under their rule.

By looking to Melville, MacArthur, and the age-old instincts of predation, Trump is attempting to rewrite the rules of an unwinnable war. Whether his strategy will be feasible or even attempted remains to be seen. But what is clear is that he is thinking about war in terms of strategy, not mere politics—something many world leaders have long failed to do.

Not for nothing. From which Trump expects a dividend for America.

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Photo: TOPSHOT - Palestinians members of the Ezz-Al Din Al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of the Hamas movement, attend the funeral of two fighters who were reportedly killed in Israeli bombardment of a tunnel, in Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip, on May 24, 2021. - A ceasefire was reached late last week after 11 days of deadly violence between Israel and the Hamas movement which runs Gaza, stopping Israel's devastating bombardment on the overcrowded Palestinian coastal enclave which, according to the Gaza health ministry, killed 248 Palestinians, including 66 children, and wounded more than 1,900 people. Meanwhile, rockets from Gaza claimed 12 lives in

Israel, including one child and an Israeli soldier. (Photo by SAID KHATIB / AFP) (Photo by SAID KHATIB/AFP via Getty Images)

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