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We are talking about plans for the illegal seizure of Russian property. In Russian, we call that simply theft.

DMITRY PESKOV
Kremlin spokesman
vows to pursue
individuals or
countries who are
considering using
Russian assets frozen
in Europe to help
Ukraine



Rescuers search for three people who were reported missing under the rubble of a collapsed building in Bogo City yesterday, after a powerful 6.9 magnitude earthquake jolted the central Philippines.

PHOTO: REUTERS

GAZA PEACE PLAN

Trump turns tables for Israel

AFP, Washington

In presenting a Gaza plan as an ultimatum to Hamas, US President Donald Trump has turned the tables to give Israel the advantage diplomatically -- and an even freer rein on the ground if a deal fails.

The White House on Monday released a 20-point plan that would end Israel's relentless nearly two-year offensive in Gaza, win the freedom of hostages and declare a special economic zone under Trump's tutelage.

Both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Trump warned Hamas, whose unprecedented October 7, 2023 attack ignited the war, with Trump saying Tuesday that the group would "pay in hell" if it did not accept the plan within days.

Aaron David Miller, a veteran advisor to US secretaries of state on Middle East diplomacy, said the plan had elements for success but needed far more detail fleshed out, for which Trump may not show the commitment.

"Donald Trump has strategic instincts, but he doesn't have a strategy for how to get from point A to point B," said Miller, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"He's a situationalist, he's a transactionalist. He doesn't think these things through. Anchorage is a classic example," he said, referring to Trump's summit in Alaska a month earlier with President Vladimir Putin that ended in vague talk of progress on Ukraine and, like Monday, no questions from the press.

Israel has faced growing outrage over its military campaign. The United Nations has declared famine in part of the Gaza Strip and UN investigators say Israel is committing genocide, charges both rejected by Israel.



Netanyahu and Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff had worked out revisions to the plan, which no longer clearly rules out Israeli annexation of the West Bank, an idea advocated by Netanyahu's far-right allies.

The plan is vague on Palestinian statehood, long opposed by Netanyahu, and it speaks of an eventual "credible pathway."

Brian Katulis, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute who worked on the Israeli-Palestinian issue under former president Bill Clinton, said Trump's plan was effectively a "fig leaf" to counter Hamas leaders available to make decisions," she said.

"So I think there are important reasons why we needed an updated framework."

Exasperated by Netanyahu, France, Britain and several other Western powers last week recognized a Palestinian state.

Trump, hoping to put Hamas in a corner, reached out to major Arab and Muslim states and presented a 21-point plan last week at the United Nations.

Key Arab and Muslim majority states -- including peace brokers Qatar and Egypt and key regional powers Saudi Arabia and Turkey -- hailed Trump's efforts but notably did not explicitly endorse the released plan, which was down to 20 points.

Former US president Bill Clinton laid out a far more granular deal to settle the conflict at the Camp David summit near the end of his presidency.

That summit failed, with Israel and Clinton blaming late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat for not compromising, but some Palestinians questioned whether an all-or-nothing approach was ever going to work on such complex problems.

"The historical record isn't promising on a grand bargain," said Dana Stroul, the former top Pentagon official who is a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"Even going from 21 to 20 points, that's a lot to be implemented and a lot of opportunities for spoilers," she said.

But she said the difference this time was "buy-in from the region" -- and more dire circumstances.

"The humanitarian situation is worse, the choices for the Israeli military and government are worse, Israel's international isolation is worse, and there are fewer living Hamas leaders available to make decisions," she said.

"It's like Eid," said 26-year-old Sohrab Ahmadi, a delivery driver.

After days of tension, Afghans celebrated by buying sweets and balloons, as drivers honked their horns, phones pressed to their ears.

Joy as internet restored in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Mobile networks and the internet were restored across Afghanistan yesterday, 48 hours after the Taliban authorities shut down telecommunications.

Confusion gripped the South Asian country on Monday night when mobile phone service and the internet went down without warning, freezing businesses and cutting Afghans off from the rest of the world.

The massive blackout came weeks after the government began cutting internet connections to some provinces to prevent "immorality".

AFP journalists yesterday reported that mobile phone signals and wifi had returned to provinces across the country.

The Taliban government has yet to comment on the telecommunications shutdown.

On Wednesday night, hundreds of Afghans poured onto the streets in the capital Kabul, spreading the word that the internet was back.

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Quake kills 69 in Philippines

Rescuers hunt for survivors

REUTERS, Bogo

Rescue teams in the Philippines searched for survivors in mud and rubble yesterday and authorities urged help for hospitals inundated with the injured after the deadliest earthquake in more than a decade killed at least 69 people.

Authorities said they feared the eventual toll would be even higher from the shallow 6.9-magnitude earthquake, which struck in waters off the central holiday island of Cebu late on Tuesday.

Buildings came crashing down, including a church that was more than 100 years old. Shops, homes and bridges were damaged across the island's northern coast and power was cut.

Aftershocks continued throughout yesterday, as authorities set up mobile kitchens for hundreds of evacuees and raced to provide temporary power as night approached. Bodies covered in black sheets were carried on stretchers and placed side-by-side on the ground outside a hospital in Bogo, the worst-affected city, along the coast about 18 km from the epicentre. A man wept as he pulled back a plastic sheet and clutched the face of a dead relative.

Civil defence teams were searching for signs of life beneath a landslide that had killed at least 14 people in the city. "As much as I would want to say there's no more fatalities, the toll could still go up," Cebu provincial information officer Ainjeliz Orong said of the landslide.

The quake was the country's deadliest since at least 2013, when a 7.2-magnitude quake struck the neighbouring island of Bohol, killing 222 people.

Gaza aid flotilla defies Israeli 'intimidations'

AFP, Tunis

A flotilla carrying aid to war-battered Gaza yesterday said it would stay its course despite what it called "intimidation tactics" by the Israeli military.

The Global Sumud Flotilla -- around 45 vessels carrying activists and politicians, including Swedish climate campaigner Greta Thunberg, left Spain last month, aiming to break Israel's blockade of the Palestinian territory, where the UN says famine has set in.

"In the early hours of this morning, Israeli occupation naval forces launched an intimidatory operation against the Global Sumud Flotilla," the organisers said in a statement as the vessels approached waters off Egypt, where Israel has intercepted previous attempts.

Spain and Italy, which both sent naval escorts, urged the ships to halt before entering Israel's declared exclusion zone off Gaza.

After a 10-day stop in Tunisia, where organisers reported two drone attacks, the flotilla resumed its journey on September 15.

One of its main ships, the Alma, was "aggressively circled by an Israeli warship" the group said, before another vessel, the Sirius, was subjected to "similar harassing manoeuvres".

Israel blocked similar attempts in June and July.

At around 12:30 GMT on Wednesday, Brazilian activist Thiago Avila said the flotilla was 118 nautical miles (about 220 kilometres) from the Gaza Strip.

"We sail on undeterred by Israeli threats and tactics of intimidation," the organisers added.

INDONESIA SCHOOL COLLAPSE Rescue ops on to save 90 missing

AFP, Sidoarjo

Rescuers pulled two survivors from a collapsed school in Indonesia yesterday as frantic parents demanded rescuers speed up efforts to find dozens of children believed still trapped in the rubble two days on.

Part of the multi-storey boarding school in the town of Sidoarjo on the island of Java, gave way suddenly on Monday as students gathered for afternoon prayers.

Four bodies have been retrieved and about 90 people are still missing.

Rescuers retrieved two survivors yesterday, including a boy who was taken to hospital with a head injury but was "in good condition", said Emi Freezer of the National Search and Rescue Agency.

Tearful parents milled near the ruins throughout yesterday awaiting news. Based on school records "91 people are suspected to be buried," National Disaster and Mitigation Agency spokesperson Abdul Muhari said in a statement late Tuesday.

"We believe our children might still be alive because they were crying for help," said father Abdul Hanan, whose 14-year-old son is missing. "The rescue operation must be accelerated."

"We are racing against time now," the 45-year-old added, bursting into tears.

Investigations into the cause of the collapse are ongoing but initial signs point to structural issues and construction that did not meet building standards, experts said. The building folded after its foundation pillars failed to support the weight of new construction on the fourth floor of the school, said the national disaster management agency spokesman.



A relative of a victim is being carried away from the scene yesterday after a school building collapsed on Monday in Indonesia's East Java province.

Nigeria boat tragedy takes 26 lives

AFP, Lagos

A boat accident on the Niger River in southern Nigeria has killed at least 26 people, authorities in Kogi State said yesterday.

The boat was taking traders to a market in Illushi in Edo State on the other side of the river bank, Kingsley Femi Fanwo, Kogi State commissioner for information, said in a statement on X.

"Reports indicate that the unfortunate incident has allegedly claimed the lives of not less than 26 passengers," he said.

The national rescue agency, NEMA, told AFP that it had sent teams to the scene.

Accidents are common on Nigeria's busy rivers, often caused by overloaded boats, poor maintenance or failure to comply with safety regulations.

Last month, a crowded ferry boat capsized in Niger State after reportedly hitting a tree stump, drowning at least 32 people.