

Trump team on damage control after Huckabee comments on Israel

Senior administration officials have called Arab officials to explain that a Huckabee comment that Israel can control much of the Middle East did not signal a policy shift.

By Felicia Schwartz 02/23/2026 06:25 PM EST

Senior Trump administration officials have called around to several Arab countries in recent days to mollify their concerns after Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee claimed Israel has a right to control much of the Middle East.

In the discussions, officials including Deputy Secretary of State Chris Landau, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Allison Hooker and others, have explained to concerned countries that Huckabee's [assertion in a podcast interview](#) with Tucker Carlson reflects his personal views and is not a shift in administration policy, according to three people familiar with outreach, who were granted anonymity to discuss sensitive diplomatic discussions.

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The State Department did not respond to a request for comment.

Huckabee's interview has sparked outrage among Arab and Muslim countries, and his comments were a significant departure from the Trump administration's stance on



Israeli sovereignty. [President Donald Trump has promised](#) Arab and Muslim leaders he would not let Israel annex the West Bank.

The flap comes at a particularly sensitive moment, as the Trump administration is trying to enlist Arab and Muslim nations to help with its ambitious plans to secure and rebuild Gaza.

Trump will also need support from Arab countries that host U.S. military facilities like Qatar and Jordan should he make good on his threats to attack Iran.

In the interview, which was released Friday, Carlson asked Huckabee whether Israel had the right to an area that constituted “essentially the entire Middle East” — in Carlson’s interpretation of the Bible, from the Nile to the Euphrates. Huckabee said “it would be fine if it took it all” but said Israel was not seeking to do so. He said Israel is “asking to take the land that they now occupy” and protect its people, in reference to Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank. In a later part of the exchange, Huckabee said his comment was “somewhat of a hyperbolic statement.”

More than a dozen governments such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates condemned the comments [in a joint statement](#) Saturday, calling Huckabee’s assertions “dangerous and inflammatory” as well as directly contradictory to Trump’s plans for the Gaza Strip.

The remarks threaten to derail one of the Trump administration’s key goals: integrating Israel into the Middle East, said one of the people familiar with the conversations, a senior diplomat from a Gulf country.



“The sovereignty of Arab states is not something to be made light of, specifically when we are in the midst of attempting to create a unified Middle East that includes Israel,” the diplomat said.

The U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem [said over the weekend](#) Huckabee’s comments “were taken out of context.”

Huckabee has posted several times on X to criticize Carlson since the interview was released. He has [faulted news outlets for covering](#) his remarks about possible Israeli control of the Middle East without providing “the full context.”

Huckabee, an evangelical Christian who has long supported the West Bank settlement movement, has long been seen as a more extreme voice on Israel in the administration.

“He doesn’t represent our views and doesn’t represent the best version of the pro-Israel position,” said another one of the people, a State Department official, granted anonymity to speak candidly about ideological splits in government.

In the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel captured the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt and the Golan Heights from Syria. Israel returned the Sinai to Egypt under the peace treaty that followed the 1973 war, and Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005. After an October ceasefire with Hamas that ended two years of combat, Israeli troops now hold much of eastern Gaza.

More than 500,000 Israelis live in more than 100 Israeli settlements built across the occupied West Bank, in addition to more than 200,000 settlers in East Jerusalem, which was annexed by Israel in 1967. A majority of United Nations members considers



all the settlements to be illegal. Palestinians claim East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza for a future state.

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