

Trump, disrupter-in-chief

written by David M. Weinberg | 08.02.2025

Naysayers around the world and in Israel hewed to international diplomatic orthodoxies in reacting to President Donald Trump's announcement this week that the US would take control of the Gaza Strip and permanently "relocate" Palestinians elsewhere.

Few understood what Trump was trying to do, which is to upend decades of stale thinking about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Russia barked that there was "no alternative to the two-state solution," and France bellowed that "the expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza would violate international law."

Saudi Arabia rejected "any infringement on the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, whether through Israeli settlement policies, the annexation of Palestinian lands, or attempts to displace the Palestinian people from their land."

Mainstream commentators in the US and Israel laughed at Trump for proposing something that was neither feasible nor wise, in their view.

Others dismissed Trump for applying "tawdry real estate thinking" to a protracted ideological conflict.

Left-wing Israeli editors and reporters predictably bemoaned the fact that Trump had gifted Netanyahu a political lifeline by articulating an idea that would bring the hard-Right back into his governing coalition and provide Netanyahu with fodder for his next election campaign.

All this is hackneyed politics or stupid analysis. It misses Trump's titanic point, his gargantuan insight: What was can no longer be.

It makes no sense to punish Israel or reward the Palestinians with the usual diplomatic playbook. That would be a recipe for yet more suffering, stalemate, and war.

Instead, paradigms have to change. New coordinates must be placed on diplomatic maps.

First and foremost in this transformation is that there must be a cost to decades of Palestinian aggression against Israel.

Palestinians cannot invade Israel, massacre and rape and kidnap Israeli citizens, and then run to international forums and courts to criminalize Israel and swear allegiance to annihilationist ideologies and loyalty to jihadist Iran - and expect a return to the status quo ante.

They cannot expect that Israel will nicely and swiftly withdraw to some supposedly sacrosanct lines after being forced to mount yet another costly military counter-assault.

Israel cannot be expected to let Hamas live-on in control of Gaza to fight it another day.

PALESTINIANS CANNOT expect the world (or at least, America) to dumbly pour yet again billions of dollars of rehabilitation and aid funds into their corrupt and militarized dictatorships.

Who in their right mind thinks to rebuild Gaza under Hamas, where every pile of rubble is wired to explode with Iranian-provided bombs and every building still standing has a terror attack tunnel burrowed underneath it?

Trump challenges conventions, and it works

Donald Trump, disrupter-in-chief, is saying that it is time for new thinking. He is challenging conventions.

Even if his “Trumpsfer” plan is a nonstarter, even if the plan is unrealistic, it forces everybody to abandon failed fallback templates.

Trump is saying that the EKP (the “Everybody Knows Paradigm,” also known as the “Clinton Parameters”) may be kaput. Is it true that a full-fledged Palestinian state in a unified West Bank and Gaza will bring peace to the Mideast and that “only” this formula can guarantee Israel’s future? Perhaps not.

Is it really true that if billions are ploughed into Gaza reconstruction by the international community, the Palestinians currently there will discover that it is worth investing in peace with Israel? Perhaps not.

Therefore, any movement away from antiquated formulas for resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – most of which have been based on maximalist Palestinian demands deemed holy by the international community – is a huge achievement.

Essentially, Trump is moving to reset the Mideast diplomatic table based on historical truths and concrete realities.

His previous administration wholly rejected the notion that an Israeli-Palestinian solution should begin from any 75-year-old armistice line forced upon Israel by Arab aggression; or from the defensive “security barrier” forced upon Israel by Palestinian terrorism; or from any borders dictated by politicized international organizations and jaundiced legal tribunals.

Today, Washington is also rebuffing the Palestinian notion that Jerusalem can be coerced into wide-ranging withdrawals by appealing to international courts to criminalize Israel.

THE TRUMP administration is rejecting the system of never-ending Palestinian refugeehood backed by organizations like UNRWA, which have underpinned the belief that Gaza (or any other piece of land the Palestinians control) is not a home, but merely a launching pad for reconquering “Palestine from the River to the Sea.”

Trump is asserting that the Clinton parameters do not adequately conform to today’s dramatically changed Mideast security environment.

And that those parameters insufficiently contemplated the irredentist, almost Nazi-like nature of much of the Palestinian national movement.

The tired EKP also underwrote a dynamic whereby every Palestinian failure in responsible state-building was forgiven; every Palestinian rejection of a reasonable peace offer was explained-away; and every Palestinian assault on Israel was excused in international forums, including the invasion and massacre of October 7, 2023.

At the same time, unilateral Palestinian steps against Israel were accepted with equanimity – such as appeals to have their statehood unilaterally recognized by the UN without negotiation or compromise; appeals to the International Criminal

Court and International Court of Justice to penalize Israel; and illegal building of Palestinian settlements in Area C of the West Bank.

Israel was expected to do nothing in response to these Palestinian assaults. It was supposed to wait endlessly for a negotiation with Palestinians that Palestinian leadership never wanted and repeatedly rejects.

Israel also was expected to hang on for a peaceful and democratic Palestinian political culture to miraculously emerge.

This would involve, alas implausibly, a unified Palestinian government that doesn't pay people to kill Israelis, that disarms Hamas and other terrorist armies in its midst, that ends the teaching of antisemitism and genocidal attitudes toward Israel in its schools and media, that respects human rights, that is prepared to reconcile with Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people, that accepts as legitimate (at least some) Jewish settlement in Judea and Samaria, that accepts Israeli security control of the two-state envelope, etc.

In the meantime, of course, Israel had been expected to take no unilateral action to secure its baseline national and security assets. Well, that no longer holds, thanks to President Trump.

A method to Trump's seeming madness

THERE IS a method to Trump's seeming madness. He and his team seem to have intuited the truth that the real challenge in Palestinian-Israeli affairs is to unleash long-term dynamics that shatter obsolete approaches, and which might regenerate belief in the possibility of peace.

In this regard, one assumes that the Trump team has taken notice of tectonic realignments in Israeli public opinion - against establishment of any Palestinian state, in favor of extending Israeli sovereignty to much of Judea and Samaria, and in favor of expelling Gaza Arabs.

This is not a function of Israeli "trauma," as some condescending European leaders have suggested. Rather, it is informed political maturation.

Don't snottily dismiss Israeli "fears" of Palestinian terrorism (or of Iranian nuclear attack) as if the Israeli public is a psychological weakling that needs to be

coddled; as if Israel is a polity that needs security “assurances” and international “guarantees” so that it can revert to the good old Oslo-era “solutions.”

Rather, Israel has undergone an informed political maturation – call it a hawkish transformation or the ripening of hard-earned wisdom, whatever you wish.

In short, Israelis agree with Trump that they cannot make – that the region and the world must not make – the same mistakes over and over again.

Trump is absolutely correct about this: “They’ve tried other solutions [writer’s note: like rebuilding Gaza with a Palestinian government], and they’ve tried it for decades and decades and decades. It’s not going to work.

It didn’t work, it will never work. And you have to learn from history. History is, you know: [We] just can’t let it keep repeating itself.”

To this one should add Trump’s recognition of Israel’s justified and necessary victories, and its strategic value to the US. “Israel has endured a sustained, aggressive, and murderous assault on every front. But it fought back bravely after an all-out attack on the very existence of a Jewish state in the Jewish homeland,” he said.

“The Israelis stood strong and united in the face of an enemy that kidnapped, tortured, raped, and slaughtered innocent women and children. I salute the Israeli people for meeting this trial with courage, determination, and unflinching resolve.”

Israeli military victories and innovative diplomatic approaches like the president’s are the path to eventual peace and prosperity. Trump’s disruption is a good thing.

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