

## **Initial Biden Administration Policy Steps to Advance Israeli-Palestinian Peacemaking**

### **Summary of a Mitvim Institute Task Team's Recommendations**

**January 2021**

**This document summarizes recommendations for initial policy steps that the Biden Administration could take to advance Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking. It identifies nine key goals for the new administration and outlines concrete policy steps for their implementation. The document is the product of a Mitvim Institute task-team comprised of (in alphabetical order) Kamal Ali-Hassan, Dr. Ehud Eiran, Dr. Nimrod Goren, Merav Kahana-Dagan, Dr. Roei Kibrik, Dr. Lior Lehrs, Gabriel Mitchell, Prof. Elie Podeh, former MK Ksenia Svetlova, Nadav Tamir and Yonatan Touval.**

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Joe Biden began his term as US President at a time when the Israeli-Palestinian peace process is in a deep and continued stagnation. The Trump Administration's policies on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict only served to create a rift between Washington and Ramallah, compromising the traditional American role as mediator in the conflict. The incoming administration faces a host of challenges, both domestic and global. While the Israeli-Palestinian issue is not expected to figure prominently on the administration's short-term agenda, Biden's foreign policy and defense appointees are expected to deal with the issue.

The early days of a new administration are an important period of organizing, learning and preparing. Patterns consolidated during this period impact the administration's future course, and the mechanisms and principles adopted serve as the basis for policy and set the tone for the coming years. Administrations have maximum power and enjoy abundant credit in their early days. That is particularly true for the Biden Administration that also enjoys a majority in both houses of Congress, and which could make good use of this period to create a momentum for advancing Israeli-Palestinian peace. To that end, the Mitvim Institute task-teams recommends the following policy directions.

**1. Highlighting the importance of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.** The Israeli-Palestinian issue has been marginalized in recent years on the international agenda, with global actors shifting to domestic concerns and more burning regional issues, and to the Covid-19 crisis. Despite the myriad of challenges it faces, the Biden Administration must signal at the outset that it attributes importance to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and initiate declarations and steps attesting to its intention to restore the issue to the international agenda.

**2. Renewing ties and building trust with the Palestinian leadership.** The incoming administration must announce at an early stage the renewal of US ties with the Palestinian leadership and launch a high-level political dialogue. The renewed ties should walk back Trump-era measures by re-opening the PLO offices in Washington and the US Consulate in East Jerusalem, and resuming USAID assistance to the Palestinians and funding for

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UNRWA. The administration could also advance confidence-building measures vis-à-vis the Palestinians, such as promoting economic projects in Area C and assisting in alleviating the Covid-19 crisis. Declaring the return of the US to its traditional support of the two-state solution and opposition to settlements would also be of importance.

**3. Emphasizing US commitment to the two-state solution and formulating parameters for a final-status agreement.** The Biden Administration must declare its commitment to the two-state solution based on the 1967 borders and mutually agreed land swaps as its vision for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Such a declaration would ratify the US commitment to international norms, the principles of international law and UN Security Council resolutions. At the same time, the administration should start formulating parameters for a final-status Israeli-Palestinian agreement, to serve as a clear framework for future negotiations and shape the domestic and international discourse. However, the administration should also weigh the challenges in such a move and carefully consider the correct timing and manner of unveiling such parameters.

**4. Preserving the feasibility of the two-state solution and drawing red lines.** The Biden Administration must ensure that the two-state plan is preserved as a feasible and concrete solution, blocking efforts on the ground designed to make it irrelevant. The administration will have to draw clear red lines against creeping annexation measures, expansion of settlements, legalization of outposts and Israeli construction in the E1 Area and Givat Hamatos. At the same time, the administration could demand that Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) ratify their commitment to their previous agreements and maintain security and civilian coordination, while demanding that the Palestinians mount a determined campaign against terrorism, condemn terror attacks and counter incitement.

**5. Leading multilateral steps, such as creating a new international mechanism and an incentives package.** The Biden Administration should lead the formation of an international mechanism for the advancement of Israeli-Palestinian peace. Such a mechanism could be based on the P5+1 model (which negotiated the Iran nuclear deal) or on the Quartet, with the addition of key Arab and European states. This mechanism should put together an international incentives package for peace and outline international parameters for resolution of the conflict. It could also serve as a platform for additional multilateral measures, such as forming regional working groups, harnessing regional organizations of which Israel and the PA are members and convening an international peace conference.

**6. Leveraging Israeli-Arab normalization to advance the peace process.** The administration should harness progress in relations between Israel and Arab states for the benefit of advancing Israeli-Palestinian peace. In doing so, it could integrate the states that have normalized relations with Israel into joint forums with Israel and the Palestinians, and into economic and energy projects in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In attempting to promote normalization agreements with additional Arab states, especially with Saudi Arabia, the administration could create a linkage to the Palestinian issue, inter alia by conditioning normalization on a halt of settlements' construction and creeping annexation.

**7. Improving the situation in Gaza and ending the internal Palestinian divide.** The Gaza Strip is facing a harsh humanitarian crisis, beset by explosive tensions that could escalate into violent clashes at any moment. The US has consistently distanced itself from the issue, but the new administration must stop avoiding it and help advance a solution. The administration should advance plans and projects with international partners to improve the well-being of Gaza's residents, on issues such as energy, border crossings and vaccines.

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The administration would also do well to increase its involvement in efforts to avoid clashes between Israel and Hamas, help the UN envoy's efforts on this front, and seek to advance a long-term solution to the Gaza issue under the aegis of the PA.

#### **8. Empowering pro-peace Israeli and Palestinian actors, including in the civil society.**

The Biden Administration should advance dialogue and cooperation between citizens on both sides of the conflict. The administration should provide backing for pro-peace civil society organizations in Israel and the PA, including regular meetings of administration representatives with them, and seek effective implementation of recent legislation that aids organizations engaged in Palestinian-Israeli cooperation (Nita M. Lowey Middle East Partnership for Peace Act). At the same time, the administration should appeal directly to various elements within Israel society in order to strengthen support for the two-state solution and promote a discourse on this issue, while working on the Palestinian side to stem the anti-normalization trend undermining joint Israeli-Palestinian activity.

#### **9. Setting a constructive tone to relations with the Israeli leadership and public.**

The administration should shape relations with Israel in a manner conducive to the advancement of peace and creation of mutual trust. It should learn lessons from the Obama years regarding the relationship with Israel's government and society, and pay attention to the tone and style of the discourse even when expressing criticism. The Biden Administration could initiate public goodwill gestures toward Israelis, and display public expressions of sympathy for Israel, and at the same time present the government with clear demands on the Palestinian issue and set red lines.