

## Possible Benefits of American Parameters for the Two-State Solution

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As US President Barack Obama's term in office is nearing its end, he may choose to present parameters for an Israeli-Palestinian final-status agreement before departing from the White House, similar to what President Bill Clinton did in 2000. The window of opportunity for this is between the US presidential elections (November 8, 2016) to the inauguration of the next president (January 20, 2017).

Should President Obama indeed decide to introduce parameters for a two-state solution, he has several options for doing so. He can deliver a presidential speech and leave it at that; or, he can bring the content of the speech to non-binding ratification in a multinational body or forum (such as the Quartet or an international peace conference). He can also bring those parameters as a proposal for a binding resolution in the UN's Security Council. Also, the US president has at his disposal different options regarding the wording of the parameters themselves. President Obama can limit himself to a general text, or formulate a more detailed one; he can try to reconcile both sides by using relatively softened wording, or use more assertive wording to challenge the positions of the current Israeli and Palestinian leaderships.

There is still no certainty that President Obama has decided to take any final action regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, before the end of his term in office. Even if he does decide to do so, a presentation of parameters is not the only option he has. Instead, he may choose to step up pressure on Israel regarding the settlements. Nevertheless, some kind of presentation of parameters emerges as a feasible course of action, in light of the precedent set by President Clinton and the assumption that a set of parameters can be advantageous for the advancement of Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution.

However, these advantages are still hidden from the eyes of the Israeli public. [The 2016 Israeli Foreign Policy Index of the Mitvim Institute](#) shows that only 17% of the Israeli public thinks that a presentation of parameters by President Obama will contribute to advancing the peace process. Meanwhile, 54% think that it won't have an effect at all, while 29% think the opposite: that it will interfere with the advancement of peace. The impression is that similar attitudes exist in the Israeli political stage as well.

In light of this, the Mitvim Institute convened (September 22, 2016) a group of Israeli experts from various organizations to map out possible advantages or benefits to be gained from a presentation of American parameters for the two-state solution. Below are the benefits identified in this policy-workshop:

- 1. Creating continuity along with change, regarding Bill Clinton's parameters** – in general, American parameters (should President Obama opt for this) are expected to be based on those presented by Bill Clinton in 2000. The general framework is well known, but Clinton's parameters need to be changed and updated in light of the changes that took place in the region and on the ground throughout the last sixteen

years. Therefore, an initiative by President Obama may well resolve the time-gap with regard to the following issues: the need for Palestinian unity between Gaza and the West Bank; recognition of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people; mutual and equal in size land swaps; the Arab Peace Initiative; ramifications of continued construction in the settlements. Any parameters conceived by President Obama are not expected to lead to immediate steps in the peace process, and will not necessarily obligate the next president. However, they will transmit a clear message regarding the American position on how the conflict should be resolved, and regarding the consistency of this position throughout the years.

- 2. Increasing clarity regarding the final-status agreement** – presenting parameters for an Israeli-Palestinian final-status agreement is an essential step on the part of the US and the international community. This is despite – perhaps even because of – the current deadlock in the peace process. Parameters would supply the clarity that is presently lacking, regarding the way in which the core issues of the conflict may be resolved, with an emphasis on the issue of borders. The deeper and more detailed the parameters will be – far beyond the general statements made in the past – the more clarity they will provide regarding the path needed to resolve the conflict. Without clear parameters, the chances for the success of any diplomatic move regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – multilateral, bilateral, or unilateral – are much lower. A presentation of parameters is important not only at the upcoming presidential transition juncture. If President Obama will eventually avoid such a move, the next administration should do so, preferably in the first year of its term.
- 3. Creating a renewed momentum for the two-state solution** – the peace process deadlock leads to skepticism regarding the relevancy and feasibility of the two-state solution. The “two-state solution” concept becomes empty of meaning when different politicians assign substantively different meanings to it, and when they do nothing to advance it. A presentation of parameters will help instill renewed meaning into the two-state solution, and halt the trickle of support for the one-state concept that is mainly manifested among Palestinian youths. Updating Clinton’s parameters can be the first stage in the process of updating the key international documents connected to the peace process, for example the Quartet’s Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. These documents are over a dozen years old, and were disseminated under completely different regional circumstances. The documents must be refreshed and adapted to contemporary reality, in order to harness an Israeli and Palestinian young public that searches for invigorated new ways to resolve the conflict. The publicizing of the parameters may also create a more favorable environment for countries and multinational bodies to take steps aimed at advancing conflict resolution.
- 4. Making future Israeli-Palestinian negotiations more effective** – parameters can help bypass additional useless rounds of negotiations. Recent negotiations took place mainly because of the importance felt by one (or more) of the sides for going through the motions of negotiations, but without real intentions of advancing toward an agreement. Parameters can serve as an “entrance ticket” to more effective negotiations in the future. The parties will be required to demonstrate a positive attitude toward the parameters as a basis for talks, before negotiations even begin. This will demonstrate that the sides have serious intentions, and ensure that the talks will not involve empty words alone, devoid of meaning. True, this may make it more difficult to initially begin the negotiations. However, if both parties have the political will to resolve the conflict, then the creation of a framework, a conceptual ‘anchor’ and an objective for the talks, will support the negotiations once they begin. In any

event, the parameters will not determine the results of the negotiations. Ultimately, the details of the Israeli-Palestinian final-status agreement will be hammered out between the sides themselves. When that will come to pass, the international community will support them even if the results differ from the parameters.

- 5. Deepening international involvement in the peace process** – Clinton's parameters remained, in its time, a solely American plan. If President Obama should present his own parameters, it would be an opportunity to create international consensus regarding them which, in turn, would instill the parameters with a more binding status, and enhance their legitimacy. Over the last two years, various attempts have been made to create a new international architecture to advance the peace process. These have included: the idea to establish an International Support Group; the efforts to revive the Quartet; the French peace initiative; and different proposals for resolutions at the UN's Security Council. However, none of these has been followed-through or found to be effective. Parameters could help here – if they go beyond the speech of an American president and are brought as a proposal to the Security Council or adopted by another relevant international forum, such as the Quartet or an international peace conference (as the one that the French are trying to convene).
- 6. Igniting separate international engagement with each side to the conflict** – parameters may enable the international community to adopt a new approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in the absence of negotiations between the sides. This approach can be based on agreement regarding the final goal of the peace process, consistent with the parameters, and can include separate talks with Israel and the Palestinians for finding steps that each side could adopt independently, in order to advance to the same goal. Thus, the parameters will not only assist the international community in delineating the desired goal, but also allow it to examine whether each step taken by the sides to the conflict, promote a two-state reality or not. They will also assist countries and multinational bodies in assessing whether various steps they are considering to take (for example, recognition of a Palestinian state) will help promote a two-state reality/solution.
- 7. Sharpening the discourse in Israel regarding the final-status agreement** – the discourse in Israel regarding the two-state solution includes contradictions and knowledge-gaps. Positions and attitudes regarding it in the large parties tend to be fuzzy and unclear. There is a tendency to adopt general, abstract statements lacking clear political content. Parameters could pave the way to more realistic, thought-out political and public discussions. They would clarify to the Israeli politicians and public, what the US really means when it talks about a two-state solution. In light of the special relationship between Israel and the US, Knesset members would be hard put to reject the parameters outright, as they do to the initiatives of the Quartet and the European countries. Parties in the opposition could adopt the parameters as a clear alternative to the government's policy, include it in their platforms toward the next elections, and demand a clear decision from the public. Peace organizations could benefit from the fact that the parameters would banish much of the existing public opaqueness regarding the gist of a future peace agreement, which they are trying to promote. And the Israeli public, most of which is interested in being a part of the family of nations and globalization processes, will come to understand more precisely the accepted international positions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

- 8. Advancing Israel's quests for recognition** – in recent years, Prime Minister Netanyahu emphasizes his demand that the Palestinians and international community recognize the Jewish character of the State of Israel. Today, most of Israel's citizens support Netanyahu on this, even though the essential need for such a recognition is disputable. American parameters for the two-state solution can be an opportunity for Israel to gain such recognition, at least from the US. Senior US administration officials have responded favorably to Israel's quest for such recognition, and it can thus be assumed that the parameters will express this as well. If the parameters will be ratified in any multinational forum at all, Israel will receive such recognition from additional international actors. In addition, the parameters are expected to emphasize the option of international recognition of West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel (side by side with the recognition of East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital) with the attainment of the two-state solution. In this way, the parameters will not only present demands of Israel, but also show Israel's public some of the advantages embodied in achieving peace with the Palestinians.