

The Trump Plan: Not the Way to Advance Israeli-Palestinian Peace

Commentaries by Mitvim Institute Experts

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Following the publication of the Trump plan, Mitvim Institute experts argue that this is not the way to advance Israeli-Palestinian peace. This document includes initial commentaries by Nadav Tamir, who claims that Israel needs a real peace plan; Dr. Nimrod Goren, who calls on the international community to say “no” to the Trump plan; Dr. Lior Lehrs, who explains that on the Jerusalem issue, Trump shatters the status quo and previous understandings; Yonatan Touval, who argues that Trump takes problematic diplomatic practices of his predecessors to the extreme; Prof. Elie Podeh, who contends that the Trump plan is not even an opportunity for peace; Former MK Ksenia Svetlova, who warns that the Trump plan might endanger Israel’s warming ties with Arab countries; Dr. Maya Sion-Tzidkiyahu, who claims that while the EU remains committed to the two-state solution, it struggles to respond to the Trump plan; Merav Kahana-Dagan, who identifies an opportunity to bring the Palestinian issue back to the forefront; Amb. (ret.) Barukh Binah, who calls on Israeli leaders to seek diplomatic, not only security, advice; and Dr. Roei Kibrik, who thinks that Israelis should decide what type of country they want to live in.

Israel Needs a Real Peace Plan **Former Diplomat Nadav Tamir, Board Member at the Mitvim Institute**

The Trump plan contradicts Israel’s interests, distances the two-state solution and was published at a problematic political timing. Therefore, it is likely to bring more damage than benefit. A two-state solution is an existential Israeli interest and is required in order to maintain the Zionist dream of Israel as both the state of the Jewish people and a democracy with equal rights for all its citizens. The two-state solution cannot be reached while disregarding Palestinian interests and without their involvement in the process. The Israeli leadership should have conveyed this message to the US President. The Palestinians totally reject the Trump plan, and this blocks any prospects for progress. However, we must utilize elements of the plan that can help advance peace in the future: the fact that a Palestinian state will be established, even according to Trump’s vision, and that such a state must have a capital (and a US Embassy) in East Jerusalem. Israel’s current ability to advance peace is better than in the past. Today, Israel has better Palestinian partners for peace than it had in Oslo and Camp David. The regional context is also becoming more favorable. Should the Trump plan lead to annexation, it will not only distance peace but also risk regional stability, Israel’s relations with Jordan, and the effective security coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The next Israeli prime minister should advance the publication of a real peace plan that is coordinated with the international community, rather than be dragged along by American steps that most other countries (as well as most supporters of the US Democratic Party) rightly oppose.

The International Community Should Say “No” to the Trump Plan

Dr. Nimrod Goren, Head of the Mitvim Institute

Since Trump first coined the term “deal of the century” in 2017, the international community has vacated the arena, even when it became apparent that the moves of the US president were encumbering the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. International actors failed to adopt any significant initiative of their own. Diplomats and politicians from around the world, including those who in the past expressed commitment to peace, explained their inaction with various excuses: There is no alternative to US leadership on this issue, they said. We are trying to influence the contents of the US plan behind the scenes, they claimed. We will not judge the plan before we see it, they insisted. Once the plan is revealed, we will see the glass as half full and try to move forward, they promised. They subsequently argued that there was no point in picking a fight with Trump over the Israeli-Palestinian issue as it is irrelevant, or because the US plan may not even be published. And that is how we arrived at the point where over 40 world leaders convened in Israel for the World Holocaust Forum while ignoring the heated Israeli discourse on annexing parts of the West Bank that took place at the very same time. However, the unveiling of the Trump plan must effectuate change. International supporters of peace can no longer hide behind the smoke screen of an impending US plan. They must clearly voice their stand against the unilateral plan, present alternative parameters that could truly advance Israeli-Palestinian peace, coordinate among states and bodies committed to peace and willing to invest in its advancement, and join those in Israel and the PA who refuse to accept Trump’s dictates. The next US President, perhaps a new one, will be sworn in one year from now. Until that time, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that the annexation ideas included in the Trump plan do not become reality. *(For more from Dr. Goren, [see his article in the Jerusalem Post](#))*

On Jerusalem, Trump Shatters the Status Quo and Previous Understandings

**Dr. Lior Lehrs, Director of the Program on
Israeli-Palestinian Peacemaking at the Mitvim Institute**

On Jerusalem, Trump’s plan renounces past understandings between Israelis and Palestinians, and shatters the Clinton Parameters as a model for a solution. According to the plan, most Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem will be under Israeli sovereignty, as well as all parts of the Old City. Palestinian residents of these areas will decide whether they want to be citizens of Israel or Palestine, or to keep their status as ‘residents of Israel.’ At the same time, the plan proposes to transform the route of the separation barrier from a ‘temporary security border,’ as it was defined at the time, into a permanent border between Israel and the Palestinian state. That is, areas of Jerusalem that remain beyond the fence and that have become ‘no man’s land,’ with neither Israeli nor Palestinian administration, are where the Palestinian capital city will be established. Also included is Abu Dis, which falls outside the municipal boundary; and the plan states that the Palestinians will be allowed to call it ‘Al Quds.’ This proposal connects to previous proposals for the establishment of a capital in Abu Dis. Should this manifest, Trump’s statement that Jerusalem will be undivided is inaccurate. His proposal divides the city, not between East and West but within East Jerusalem. Unlike Trump’s statements in the past, that the border between Israeli and Palestinian sovereignties in Jerusalem would be decided between the parties, his plan determines a border. The plan contradicts itself on the matter of holy sites,

saying that the status quo will be maintained, but that people of all faiths will be able to pray on the Temple Mount. The status quo, also ratified by Netanyahu in 2015, is that Jews cannot pray on Temple Mount. Trump's proposal on this can be dramatic and explosive, which is presumably why neither Trump nor Netanyahu mentioned it in their speeches.

Trump Takes Problematic Diplomatic Practices of his Predecessors to the Extreme

Yonatan Touval, Foreign Policy Analyst at the Mitvim Institute

The worst thing about the Trump plan is not the parameters it offers for a future settlement – those parameters are a non-starter anyway – but its complete obliviousness to Palestinian positions. As such, the Trump plan hollows out the very principles of diplomatic dealmaking – namely, that a lasting settlement can only be reached through a negotiated agreement. That said, Trump's diplomatic conduct is not without precedent when it comes to past U.S. efforts to forge an Israeli-Palestinian final-status agreement. In fact, Trump's plan simply takes the mediating efforts of his direct predecessors over the past 20 years – Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama – to their extreme. President Clinton's mediating efforts, most notably during the Camp David Summit he convened in July 2000, suffered from the mistaken conviction that, if he were to extract seemingly dramatic concessions from Israel, the Palestinians would come into the fold. President Bush's approach was much the same. Bush negotiated with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon the terms that would define his administration's vision for an Israeli-Palestinian final-status agreement, publicly formalized in the 2002 exchange of letters between the two leaders. Similarly, in 2005, Bush endorsed Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, ignoring Palestinian appeals to assume the role of counterparts. And under President Obama, Secretary Kerry devoted most of his time and energy during the nine months of mediation efforts in 2013-14, to testing ideas with Israel without checking their acceptability with the Palestinians. The mistaken assumption, again, was that the Palestinians would reward the US for any apparent Israeli concessions by agreeing to terms they were not even consulted about.

The Trump Plan Is Not Even an Opportunity for Peace

Prof. Elie Podeh, Board Member at the Mitvim Institute

The Trump plan is doomed to fail, first, because the US only consulted with Israel and some Arab states while sidelining the Palestinian Authority. Second, the plan unilaterally adopts positions of the Israeli right and of the settlers. The release of the plan will not advance Israel's interests. It is likely to weaken Palestinian moderates who believe in conflict resolution and the two-state solution, and to strengthen those in the Arab world who oppose peace. In such a situation, the likelihood of escalation with Hamas in Gaza and mass demonstrations in the West Bank will increase. Moreover, Egypt and Jordan, who are signatories to peace treaties with Israel, might face domestic public pressure. If Israel chooses to implement parts of the Trump plan and moves to annex territories, Egypt and Jordan may recall their ambassadors from Israel and curb bilateral relations. Such steps have already been taken in the past, and could easily happen again. Finally, the slow process of normalization between Israel and the Gulf states is likely to suffer. Angry reactions in the Arab world, based on solidarity with the Palestinian people, will probably lead Gulf leaders to lower the profile of their ties with Israel even further. The release of the Trump plan is not an opportunity to advance peace; It is a political maneuver intended to help Netanyahu get reelected. *(For more from Prof. Podeh, [see his article in Haaretz](#))*

The Trump Plan Might Endanger Israel's Warming Ties with Arab Countries

**Former MK Ksenia Svetlova, Director of the Program on
Israel-Middle East Relations at the Mitvim Institute**

The Trump plan might not only endanger the stability in Israel and in the Palestinian Authority, but also impact the Arab states and damage the progress made in Israel's relations with them. The country that is most likely to experience damage is Jordan. Its relations with Israel have already experienced several significant crises over the last few years. A hasty implementation of "the deal of the century," which the Palestinians totally reject, is dangerous for the Hashemite Kingdom and its leadership. The Trump plan is likely to strengthen the claims of the extremists and weaken those of the moderates. Should the plan lead to an escalation in the West Bank, first and foremost in Jerusalem, then normalization steps between Israel and Gulf states will take a hit and might freeze altogether. The Palestinian issue is currently not high on the Arab world's agenda, but dramatic developments and the threat of annexation can quickly return it to the forefront. In that case, Arab leaders will have to consider their domestic public opinion and react.

The EU Is Committed to the Two-State Solution, but Struggles to Respond to the Trump Plan

**Dr. Maya Sion-Tzidkiyahu, Director of the Program on
Israel-Europe Relations at the Mitvim Institute**

Following the publication of the Trump plan, the EU acknowledged the possibility that the plan would bring about the re-launching of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. But it clarified that peace should take the legitimate aspirations of both sides into account and respect "all relevant UN resolutions and internationally agreed parameters." Several European capitals expressed skepticism that the plan will succeed. Since the 1970s, the Europeans have stood by a solution of two states for two peoples, based on the 1967 borders, contingent on the agreement of both parties. The Trump plan significantly distances the Palestinians from this outcome and may create new norms in the resolution of territorial conflicts that are not acceptable to the EU. Concurrently, it is not clear if the EU and its member states will have a united position on the plan. 37 former heads of state and former foreign ministers were the first to respond and called on the EU to not support the plan. They also expressed disappointment that the US has diverged from the principles anchoring past peace plans. The Foreign Minister of Ireland joined them. It does not appear that the US President gave the Europeans a political role in his plan. Instead, and as usual, he seemingly reduced them to be the payer, which annoys the Europeans. Josep Borrell, the new EU foreign minister, declared his aspiration to transform the EU from a normative actor to a geopolitical actor, in a world where power has once again become the name of the game, and where European liberal values find themselves increasingly isolated. The Europeans are not as happy as Trump is, to intervene in Israel during an election campaign, and perhaps this is one reason why their position is so cautious and their first response is to study the plan. The British Foreign Minister, Dominic Rabb, whose country is about to leave the EU on January 31, released a more positive statement calling both sides to give the plan "a genuine and fair consideration."

An Opportunity to Bring the Palestinian Issue Back to the Forefront

Merav Kahana-Dagan, Deputy Head of the Mitvim Institute

Three years have gone by since the hollow expression, the “Deal of the Century.” was thrown into the air. Three years, in which the international community has taken a step backward from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and entered a waiting period. Three years, in which pro-peace civil society organizations have continued to try and maintain the idea of a two-state solution, while on the margins (that are expanding) they also began to think about other solutions. Three years, and so many reasons to oppose the plan. However, although the plan is not one that can actually advance peace, three positive things may happen following its publication: (1) The Palestinian issue and the peace process are becoming an issue of debate once again. Since the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, the word “peace” has disappeared from political campaigns and public discourse. The plan will bring the Palestinian issue and maybe even the word “peace” back to the discourse; (2) There will now be a need to address complicated subjects that were easy to ignore or avoid in recent years. Israeli civil society organizations have acted over the years – with Palestinian partners – to find solutions to the core issues of the conflict. In contrast to what Trump proposes, their recommendations and dialogue channels can be used in order to find new, real ways to advance peace; (3) It will now become clear that the Palestinian issue has not disappeared and will not be resolved on its own, nor without Palestinian involvement. A growing understanding is emerging in Israel, that a crisis with the Palestinians will damage regional ties that Israel seeks to advance.

Israeli Leaders Should Seek Diplomatic Advice, Not Only Security, Advice

Amb. (ret.) Barukh Binah, Policy Fellow at the Mitvim Institute

Blue and White leader Benny Gantz did well in inviting a retired general (Amir Eshel) to join him on his visit to Washington for the meeting with President Trump. After all, the Trump plan covers minute details of military importance. But, it also has many diplomatic aspects, which require an additional type of adviser. The US is Israel's most important ally. It stands by Israel in conflict as well as in peacemaking, and is the source of Israel's qualitative edge and its ability to take risks. Beyond the core of intelligence and defense cooperation, military procurement, as well as research and development, there is the diplomatic umbrella that the US opens over Israel in international organizations. The US backing of Israel is the result of complex political processes on American federal and state levels. It reflects both sides of the aisle in the two houses of Congress, the administration, public opinion in the fifty states and their respective governors (some of whom may become presidential candidates) as well as state assemblies. It also reflects the supportive involvement of an influential Jewish community. The Trump deal may reflect the special relationship between Israel and the US, and future steps towards peace will require American involvement. These, like any major step, are bound to be influenced by political developments in the US. Therefore, Benny Gantz, as well as any Israeli leader, will need the steady hand of well-seasoned and well-connected Israeli diplomats who have served in the US and know its political terrain, and not just defense-related advisers.

Israelis Should Now Decide What Type of Country they Want to Live in

Dr. Roe Kibrik, Director of Research at the Mitvim Institute

The public debate in Israel – from left to right – focuses on how the US administration chose to adopt the Israeli position, cut ties with the Palestinian leadership and damage its standing, and present a plan which is unprecedentedly pro-Israeli. This is in line with messages conveyed by the settlers, which are not shared by the majority of Israelis. In fact, most Israelis do not benefit a thing from the Palestinians suffering diplomatic losses. For decades, Israelis have opposed annexation and the option of a bi-national state (whether a democratic one or based on apartheid). Instead of more territory in Samaria or another outpost in Judea, Israel needs to build peaceful relations with its neighbors, namely the Palestinians who should live in an independent state, alongside Israel. A good plan for Israel is a plan that advances this vision, and not one that encourages messianic annexationist dreams. Towards the upcoming elections, Israelis should request parties to spell out how they plan to bring peace closer. The US should be asked to modestly contribute to peacebuilding, rather than let Israelis escape an internal debate about the kind of state they want to live in.