



PERSPECTIVES

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Securing a Jewish Future in the West Bank Following Trump's Jerusalem Declaration

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The domestic and international outcry at President Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital suggests that Israel's position in the West Bank is far from secure. If Israel wishes to secure a future for Jews in the West Bank, ordinary Palestinians there must also benefit from – and express their support for – coexistence with Jews.

President Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel roused euphoria in Zionist milieus. This euphoria was not justified. It is true that no new intifada has broken out, as Israel's enemies had hoped one would. Still, Trump's Jerusalem declaration might turn out to have been a Pyrrhic victory for Israel.

Since 1948, support for Israel has garnered overwhelming bipartisan support in the US and a near-unanimous consensus in the Jewish Diaspora. It should thus ring alarm bells that Trump's recognition of the historical capital of the Jewish People drew outspoken opposition from leading Democratic politicians and Jewish communal leaders. If Israel can no longer rely on the head of the American Reform movement to advance its rights in Jerusalem, how will it overcome far stronger opposition when the time comes to defend Jewish interests in the West Bank?

Israel is perilously isolated. Except for the current tenant of the White House, Christian Zionists, and right-wing Jews, just about everybody else in the world seems to think a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians must be predicated on the mass expulsion of Jewish families who have been residing peacefully in the West Bank for three generations.

The recent brouhaha over Jerusalem highlights the strength of the international consensus on a solution to the conflict based on two states along 1967-

equivalent borders. Even President Trump, the staunchest friend Israel has, made clear that his recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital is not intended to determine the city's boundaries in a future peace treaty. It is scarcely realistic to believe American diplomats will stand up for West Bank Jews against the whole world.

Those who think this does not matter are deluding themselves. It matters because Israeli leaders cannot count forever on Palestinian stupidity. Hamas, for instance, made a tremendous strategic blunder in using its foothold in Gaza to immediately declare jihad, build terror tunnels, and launch missiles in a bid to replace Israel with an Islamic state. Thanks to Hamas's fanaticism, Israeli diplomats have persuaded key actors on the international stage that the status quo in the West Bank is tolerable and the time has not yet come for Palestinian statehood to be recognized.

Had Hamas thought pragmatically, it would have honored a long-term ceasefire in Gaza and refused to recognize the Oslo Accords with the politically savvy argument that it supports a binational state in the Holy Land rather than the two-state solution advocated by Israel and the Palestinian Authority. If Hamas had chosen that strategy, it is far from certain that the international community would today consider it a valid reason not to recognize Palestinian independence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Unfortunately for Israel, Hamas can learn from its mistakes. There is no reason to assume it will be as foolhardy in the future as it has been so far. Israel must therefore brace itself for a future when international elites – not just foreign journalists and world public opinion – lay the brunt of the blame for the conflict on Israel's presence in the West Bank.

It is essential that Israel justify Jewish residential rights in the West Bank primarily in terms of democracy and [human rights](#) rather than in Biblical language. But even if Israeli *hasbara* began to defend the rights of Jewish residents in the West Bank intelligently, just doing so would probably not suffice to secure a Jewish future in the area over the long run.

Forward-thinking Israelis such as Dr. Mordechai Kedar and Jewish Home leader Naftali Bennett have realized that Israel needs a long-term plan to secure its historical and security interests in the West Bank. Their recommendations to establish sovereign emirates in the West Bank and grant Israeli citizenship to Arabs in Area C is pragmatic and serves the material and security interests of both Israelis and Palestinians.

The shortcoming of these plans is their disregard for the need to secure Palestinian support. Without that support it will be very hard to counter charges that Kedar's "emirates" are just Levantine Bantustans and that Bennett's offer of

“partial self-determination” to West Bank Palestinians amounts to permanent semi-apartheid.

The challenge for Israeli strategists is to secure Palestinian support for Jewish vital interests in the West Bank. Without it, the legitimacy of Israeli interests in this sphere will be near-zero, and not just in Brussels, Moscow, and Beijing, but in New York City and Washington DC as well. Indeed, only the acceptance by ordinary Palestinians of Israeli proposals will earn the Jewish State the overwhelming support of international elites and donor states – support that will be essential to compel the Palestinian leadership to give up its ambition of erasing Jewish life in the West Bank.

Naftali Bennett’s plan to offer Israeli citizenship to Palestinians residing in Area C is wise. However, for this move to be legitimized by the international community, it will need to reflect the wishes not only of Israeli leaders but of the approximately 100,000 Palestinians who will be affected. Bennett knows that the Palestinians living in Area C are torn between Arab-Islamic pride and fear and hatred of the Palestinian Authority. It is time for Israel to turn this situation into a win-win situation for everybody.

Israel should start to generously award work permits, scholarships, and preferential treatment rights in Israeli hospitals to Palestinians living in Area C. Furthermore, Israel should invest in the infrastructure and facilities available to Palestinians in Area C and raise them to a level comparable to neighboring Jewish communities.

The rationale behind these efforts is threefold: first, to (re)affirm the principle that Israel treats the people it rules equally; second, to demonstrate that Israeli rule in the West Bank cannot be labelled as apartheid; and third, to secure the support of Palestinians in Area C for Israel’s vital interests.

It would be a mistake to believe that if a referendum were now held in Area C most Palestinians would opt for Israeli citizenship. Decades of experience in East Jerusalem suggest that most Palestinians are too proud and patriotic to apply for Israeli citizenship. On the other hand, pride and patriotism do not prevent East Jerusalem Arabs from valuing Israeli salaries, national insurance, and unemployment benefits. Nor does it push them to murder Jews in droves as Fatah and Hamas incite them to do.

This suggests that many Palestinians are eager to find an avenue through which their honor and dignity can be reconciled with their self-interest. Israel must provide such an avenue if it wishes to secure a peaceful and prosperous future for both Israelis and Palestinians.

It is not realistic to hope that Palestinians living in the West Bank, or any substantial part of it, will endorse the plans of Kedar and Bennett in the near

future. What is realistic, however, is to convince a majority of the Palestinians living in Area C that an improved status quo during an interim period of 10 years is preferable to ruinous subjugation to the Palestinian Authority.

In concrete terms, this means Israel should plan to hold referenda in Area C asking local residents to rank their preference among the following options:

- a) Palestinian Authority rule once a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority is signed, with the subsequent loss of all Israeli economic and welfare benefits
- b) An interim period of 10 years with administrative autonomy, Israeli security, and guaranteed access to all economic and social rights awarded to Israeli citizens
- c) Israeli rule

Given sufficient Israeli *savoir faire* and the right incentives, it is probable that Area C residents would vote for the alternative that guarantees them a decade of social and economic progress. During that decade, Israel should make sure that Area C residents are rewarded for their loyalty and have excellent reasons to support option c) in a second referendum a decade down the road.

Given free and democratic support from ordinary Palestinians in Area C for cooperation with Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas will be discredited in their demands for a *judenrein* West Bank. This will pave the way for securing the peace and coexistence between Jews and Arabs in the West Bank that is the prerequisite for genuine peace between a sovereign Palestinian state and Israel.

Israel must seize the historic window of opportunity provided by an adamantly pro-Israel US administration, a weak and fragmented Arab and Muslim world, and Palestinian leaders who are corrupt, fanatical, and short-sighted, to engage ordinary Palestinians as peace partners.

It would be a critical mistake for Israeli leaders not to do so. The loud and powerful opposition to President Trump's statement on Jerusalem clearly demonstrates that Israel will need the support of ordinary Palestinians for its interests in the West Bank to be recognized by the international community, the American establishment, and even by mainstream Diaspora Jews.

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