



PERSPECTIVES

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Trump's Economic Plan Is Necessary Because Peace Is Not Possible

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: None of the three actors in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – Hamas, the PA, and Israel – envisions peace in the foreseeable future. It is this very absence of the prospect of peace that makes the Trump economic plan so timely. Engendering economic well-being does not solve deep-seated political conflict, but it does contain the prospect that differences can be expressed in less violent ways.

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Hamas can't entertain the idea of real peace for ideological reasons. It would mean openly acknowledging that the dream of Palestine "from the river to the sea" is no longer attainable, and in so doing, it would lose its legitimacy in favor of the Palestinian Authority (PA), which is recognized by the international community. Peacemaking would also mean the end of Iranian military aid and Turkish and Qatari support.

Hamas would be threatened by the same marginalization that doomed once-strong Palestinian factions like the Popular and Democratic Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine. To court oblivion for the sake of the Jews is, to say the least, unpalatable.

Even less eager to make real peace is the PA under Mahmoud Abbas. Real peace would mean the cancellation of the daily penetration of Israeli security forces, which, in close coordination with PA security forces, currently protects the PA from their common foes – Hamas and Islamic Jihad – by arresting the lion's share (70%) of their supporters. If the IDF is forced to withdraw for the

sake of peace, the PA and its political elite will be threatened with nightmarish scenarios.

At best, Hamas and Islamic Jihad would emerge strong enough to engage in a long civil war in areas controlled at present by the PA. The outcome could be a division into a sort of Palestinian Judea and Samaria, with the former controlled by the Khalaileh (the Hebronites), who form the majority of east Jerusalem and south of it, and Hamas enjoying considerable support among Palestinian Judeans from Ramallah northward. That area would be controlled by Fatah factions and overlords who would either be divided or act in unison.

At worst (from the perspective of the PA), Hamas and Islamic Jihad would be able to achieve a complete takeover along the lines of Hamas's success in Gaza in 2007.

Unlike the PLO elite of the past, which always found a refuge – first in Amman, then in Beirut, then in Tunis, and finally in Ramallah – the political elite of today's PA has literally nowhere to flee.

Not one Arab country, including Jordan, will offer them refuge, meaning a bleak future under Hamas rule. For a glimpse into that future, Abbas and his coterie have only to look at how Fatah supporters fare in the one-party Hamas state of Gaza.

Nor can most Israeli voters envision peace in the near future, much as they would like to achieve it. Not only have they internalized the bitter lessons of Oslo – dubbed a peace process, but in fact a war process – which increased Israeli casualties five-fold and doubled Palestinian casualties, but they have only to contemplate the ramifications of enabling Hamas to replicate its actions along the Gaza border over the past year on the Green Line between Israel and the PA. Consider what fires, incendiary bombs, and daily to weekly attacks along the security fence between Afula and Jerusalem would mean.

The likely impact on two key strategic points along the way – the Rabin Highway, better known as Route Six (Israel's largest highway, which runs along the country's critical epicenter in the Dan region), and Ben-Gurion Airport – is sufficient to give most Israelis pause about making "peace" anytime soon.

The occasional mortar volley would be enough to close down the Rabin Highway for long periods, paralyzing traffic across the entire Dan metropolitan area (which is already beset with traffic jams) and causing panic.

Incendiary bombs and mortars launched from places like Budrus, a village six miles from the Ben-Gurion tarmac, would close down the airport or otherwise prevent the landing of planes.

Those two ramifications alone of Hamas's "peaceful" activities would render Israel, like Lebanon since the 1970s, a good place to abandon. It is likely that the "high techers" and other members of Israel's economic elite, who live in an area stretching from north Tel Aviv to Ramat Hasharon and who overwhelmingly vote for parties that clamor for peace, would be among the first to exit.

The beauty from Hamas's point of view is that it would be able to achieve strategic objectives without inflicting Israeli death tolls on a scale large enough that it would justify Israeli retaliation in the eyes of the international community.

It is this very absence of any real prospects for peace that makes the Trump economic plan so timely.

A seminal article written by Columbia University political scientist Alfred Stepan and Cindy Skach thirty years ago explains why. They showed that societies that enjoy a per capita GDP of \$8,000 (\$16,000 dollars today) do not engage in violent political behavior, either because they have too much to lose, or because they have become too used to the air-conditioned mall, or both.

Israeli Arab behavior during Arafat's terror war (euphemized as the "al-Aqsa Intifada") demonstrates the validity of this finding. The bloodcurdling chants of "*Khaybar, Khaybar ya Yahud, Jeish Muhammad sa Ya'ud*" (warning the Jews that they will meet the same fate they once encountered against Muhammad's army) and the many near lynchings perpetrated against fellow Israeli citizens who happened to be Jews lasted only ten days, while the terror war lasted three years beyond that.

Either the Israeli Arabs felt they had too much to lose, or, as Arab party activists often complain, they spend considerably more time at the mall than at demonstrations. Israel's Arab citizens have not been involved in widespread violence since then.

Engendering economic well-being does not solve deep-seated political conflicts, but it holds out the prospect that differences can be expressed in less violent ways. Trump's plan might save both Israeli Jewish and Arab lives alike – provided, of course, that it is not followed by a delusional peace process.

This is an edited version of an [article](#) that appeared in the Jerusalem Post on July 10, 2019.

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