

Trump's plan for Gaza: a new start on an intractable problem

By Conrad Black

There have been the predictable negative reactions around Europe about President Trump's comments on Gaza, and particularly the proposal effectively to remove the current population, and recreate Gaza as a model redeveloped community for deserving residents. This is, indeed, at first glance, an outlandish idea, but insofar as it constitutes a new start on an intractable problem, and especially until the US president is more precise about what he proposes and how he intends to achieve it, his idea appears to have considerable promise.



A choice in Gaza, Groundhog Day repeats, or listen to Trump. (Photo by Ahmad Hasaballah/Getty Images)

The population of Gaza of two million human shields, now precariously inhabiting a rubble heap, is still brutally governed by a terrorist organisation which since the recent

pause in fighting has effectively come out of hiding in a distinctive blue-shirted outfit to demonstrate to the world that despite having spent over a year hiding in underground bunkers and dodging around in the wreckage of buildings that had been brought down upon their heads, still rules. Hamas is still there despite having lost more than 80 per cent of their original 25,000 trained and armed terrorist force. It must be assumed that a significant proportion of those who have been lost will be replaced by new recruits eager to fight and if necessary, as is usually the case, die for the hopeless cause of exterminating Israel.

Since Gaza's borders are entirely with Israel and Egypt and neither country will accept refugees from Gaza, Trump's proposal depends in part on two questions which remain to be answered: how many Gazans, if given the opportunity to move to a less troubled and more prosperous place, would take the opportunity to do that, and who might admit such refugees? Trump has mentioned Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, and all have said, with alacrity, that they will not accept any Palestinians. This reinforces the potential utility of what Trump is doing, because it illustrates that even the comparatively friendly Arabs are addicted, despite disclaimers, to the Groundhog Day re-enactment of each succeeding day being an exact repetition of the previous one: Israel is hemmed in by terrorist-governed Arabs claiming to be the rightful occupants of the land of Israel who refuse to acknowledge the right of the State of Israel to exist as a Jewish country and have rejected nine consecutive versions of a two-state solution. Since the British in 1917 effectively promised the same territory simultaneously to the Jews and the Arabs, there has never been any solution except a division of the territory between Jews and Arabs, which has now conclusively been proved to be impossible because of the refusal of the local Arabs, with the vocal and more recently tacit support of the Arab powers, to accept such a solution. In these circumstances, President Trump should not be blamed

for seeking a new approach.

The likely fact is that if given the opportunity to move to a nearby place of assured comparative peace and prosperity, the majority of Gazans would do so, and it is also likely that given the level of Jordanian and Egyptian dependence on aid from the United States, President Trump is capable of incentivizing those countries to accept such refugees. The way to accomplish this without stirring up the usual confected and insincere Arab nervousness over "breaking up and scattering" the Palestinian people, would be to deposit most of them in Western Jordan and induce the King of Jordan to sever that part of his country in contribution to a united Palestine with part of the West Bank and a contrived access to the sea via either Lebanon, Israel, or Jordan, to prevent the new Palestine, which would be linked to a modified West Bank, from being a landlocked country. The West Bank could then shed part of its western territory so that Israel is not again nine miles wide at its narrowest point. Jordan's Bedouin minority would thus be strengthened by shedding some of its Palestinians. The Gazans who accepted this proposal would be separated from the Hamas extremists who would remain behind but without the human shields behind whom they have sheltered these 20 years since Israel voluntarily evacuated the territory (when George W. Bush, on the mistaken assumption that democratic elections never produce undemocratic results, promoted the election of Hamas). Of course, Hamas militants could leave with the other Gazans to their new destination, but they could not take their weapons with them and their activities in their new locale would be designed to gain control of the new Palestinian political entity and the provocation of Israel would become a much more complicated enterprise, if it were still feasible at all.

The present Fatah government in the West Bank, led by the 85-year-old Mahmoud Abbas, is completely moribund and corrupt and trusted by no one. If an extended trans-Jordan Palestinian

entity came into existence, it would be a much more promising vehicle for the ambitions of the beleaguered detritus of the Arab population of the former League of Nations Palestine Mandate than the present bifurcated tandem of the Hamas terrorist state in Gaza and the Palestine Authority's geriatric kleptocracy on the West Bank. In any case, the Trump initiative can safely be seen as one that has recruited the Israeli hawks behind him so that he can ultimately get them to sign on to considerably less than they are now demanding, and has driven the Arab powers off the fence of hypocrisy upon which they were perched, where they insisted on a Palestinian state but contributed nothing worthwhile to defining or creating that state. The fearful tenor of the official Saudi, Egyptian and Jordanian reaction to Trump's remarks indicates that they too will be prepared to settle for less than they have traditionally asked.

Though it is admittedly difficult to discern, the Trump initiative in these long-hopeless circumstances probably constitutes progress.

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