

# The Pieces of Trump's Peace

By Victor Davis Hanson

What did Donald Trump do differently to obtain at least temporary calm in the Middle East compared to the failed efforts of past administrations, foreign powers, and the United Nations? Let us count ten different approaches.



1. Trump curtailed a considerable amount of Iranian oil income and its dispersal. He stopped, for the near future, the Iranian effort to build a bomb. Trump also allowed Israel to destroy Tehran's air defenses, humiliate it militarily, and eliminate many of its top military officers and nuclear physicists. Thus, Israel's half-century-long worries about Iranian nukes were addressed. At the same time, its stature as a military power soared to an all-time high—even if it became more isolated politically. Israel became more confident but also more sensitive to past, current, and future American military and political support—or pressure.

2. Trump allowed Netanyahu to destroy Hamas, cripple Hezbollah, and retaliate at will against the Houthis. That liberation led to general dejection among Israel's enemies and a resurgence in Netanyahu's own political fortunes. And that rise of Israel and the collapse of the Iranian terrorist network—the "ring of fire"—explain the greater chances for a

ceasefire and possibly a peace. Trump allowed no daylight between Israel and the U.S., which, under the Biden administration, may have sent the wrong signals to Hamas prior to October 7.

So there is now no terrorist Palestinian leader, such as a Yasser Arafat or an all-powerful Hamas killer, to sandbag negotiations. Instead, Trump involved a number of self-interested surrogate Arab officials who have the money and influence to rebuild Gaza and restore calm on their own terms. Trump and Israel are not just negotiating from positions of historic strength, but they have also empowered the reasonable Arab nations to have honor and clout in Middle East negotiations in an unprecedented fashion.

3. Trump also leveraged all his benefactions to Israel by pressuring it to agree to a ceasefire. Even the optics of a strong Israeli leader conceding to Trump that there would be no annexation of the West Bank gave the U.S. credibility in the Arab world as an honest broker and yet paradoxically helped Israel's global reputation—as well as Netanyahu's—as a more flexible negotiator.

4. Trump used the Abraham Accords and his much-maligned tariffs, along with expanding or curtailing commercial access into U.S. markets, to pressure—or persuade—the Gulf and moderate Arab states to ensure funding for Gaza reconstruction and the continued political weakening of Hamas. There is a sense in the Middle East, as elsewhere, that when it comes to new technologies such as AI, robotics, genetic engineering, and cryptocurrencies, the U.S. will remain the global leader, and thus a nation to court and please.

5. Trump, in carrot-and-stick fashion, promised a defense protection pact with Qatar—the proverbial untrusted wild card of the Middle East. But his new quid pro quo “protectorate” also implied reining in Qatar if it should resume its customary double-dealing that so infuriates its neighbors and

increasingly enrages the West. The Israeli attack on Hamas leadership in Qatar, and the signal Israel could strike again at will, terrified Qatar and drove it to seek protection in—new dependency on—the U.S.

6. Trump dealt with enemies, allies, and neutrals from a position of strength, comparative advantage, and national ascendance, unlike the appeasing and anemic Biden years or the apologetics of Obama. The successful complex bombing of the Iranian nuclear facilities and the past elimination of terrorist Iranian General Qasem Soleimani and ISIS founder and thug Bakr al-Baghdadi ensured Trump was seen as more serious than either Obama or Biden ever were.

The Arab world and Israel also understood that there are no alternatives to Trump. Russia's Syrian outpost is gone. Moscow is bogged down in a forever war in Ukraine and under sanctions. It is no longer a force in the Middle East.

Trump has confronted China and exposed its economic vulnerabilities, ensuring that the Arabs saw no outside power comparable to the U.S.

Chinese and Russian allies, like the Iranian theocracy and the former Assad dynasty in Syria, were also shown over the last year to be shrill, impotent, losing clients. At home, restoring the U.S. border, strengthening NATO, rebooting the U.S. military, fast-tracking energy development, and cracking down on crime fed the impression of an American renaissance rather than the continued Obama-Biden-managed decline.

7. Trump was entirely transactional. Unlike the Biden administration, he did not libel the Saudis, or demonize Netanyahu, or take seriously any of the past proverbial empty "peace plans" of a corrupt UN or of terrified Europeans. He had no sooner destroyed Iran's nuclear capability than he allowed a ceremonial but innocuous "hit" on a U.S. base in Qatar and then declared he wanted to "make Iran great again."

For someone who is supposedly mercurial, holds grudges, and is reckless, Trump was careful to treat all the major parties with deference and a clean slate and offered them trade and military deals rather than diplomatese and platitudes.

8. Europe went from sandbagging Trump in 2017 to 2021 to calling him “daddy” once they realized that only Trump could save Ukraine and, by extension, Europe from Putin. The result was not an anti-American Europe trying to intrude into the Middle East negotiations or ankle-biting the U.S. To the degree that Europeans save face, it is by symbolically recognizing a Palestinian state, but not materially altering realities on the ground in Gaza. For the most part, there is now a calmer Europe, relieved that Iran was denuclearized and the Palestinian terrorists in the Middle East might no longer trigger unrest among Europe’s own restive and unassimilated Muslim populations.

9. At this 11th hour, Hamas was reminded that it has no real alternatives—as the rubble of Gaza attests. Trump signaled to Israel that it could and can still go medieval on Hamas and its remnants should they resume terrorism. Otherwise, Gaza remains a bombed-out wreck. Qatar will be pressured to kick out its conniving Hamas billionaires. The result is a stark choice: any Hamas attempt to rebuild its terrorist networks will ensure that it—and everything around it—will be moonscaped. Trump made it clear there are now no more sacred cows in the Middle East, no more safe spaces, and no more off-limits targets—juxtaposed to numerous win-win incentives that can lead to prosperity and security.

10. The Middle East was not seen as a one-off U.S. peace effort—as is usually the case. Instead, it was envisioned as a continuation of a series of *prior successful* Trump-led ceasefires between Rwanda and Congo, Armenia and Azerbaijan, India and Pakistan, Kosovo and Serbia, Cambodia and Thailand, and Egypt and Ethiopia. The Israelis and the Palestinians saw Trump’s success elsewhere and may have felt from such momentum

that the same might be possible in Gaza.

And if the ceasefire holds, or at least reduces the violence, global attention will next turn to Ukraine. Expectations in and outside the Middle East will rise that if there can be quiet in war-torn Gaza, then that momentum might lead to progress toward peace on the Ukrainian border as well.

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