

Unpredictable, Forceful, and Disruptive: The Trump Effect in the Middle East

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“Trumpism” is a disruptive strategy that creates both opportunities and risks by challenging fundamental assumptions. This disruption drives change, and its sophisticated exploitation should inform the development of new policies that could benefit Israel and the region. To some extent, the phenomenon of Trumpism is a response to the challenges facing liberal democracy and reflects public frustration with radical progressive policies. In the Middle East, this approach could open avenues for shaping a new regional order, strengthening the influence of stability-seeking states, facilitating new agreements, and resolving longstanding issues. Over the next two years, disruption is expected to be the primary force shaping both the Middle East and the global arena. It is crucial to analyze its origins and characteristics, prepare for its impact, and seek ways to leverage it for Israel’s national security.

It is difficult to predict the next move of US President Donald Trump. So far, he has repeatedly defied expert forecasts—and seems to relish doing so. How, then, can we make sense of what is happening? The liberal-democratic world has been swept into a whirlwind of declarations, a flood of executive orders, and a collection of radical, reality-altering ideas. What among all this is real? What is mere tactics, and what is strategy? Which elements are negotiation maneuvers, and which reflect deeply held values?

“Trumpism” is a response to the crisis of the liberal democratic model. A generation after its triumph in the Cold War, this model now faces an existential crisis. To understand the Trump effect—including his latest proposals, such as the “voluntary migration” initiative for Gazans to Egypt and Jordan—and the connection between this approach and Israel’s own profound societal shifts in recent years, one must first grasp the roots of this crisis, the different approaches to addressing it, and how they are applied in Trump’s foreign and security policy. His administration may even find itself at odds with Israeli policy.

A Profound Undermining of Four Fundamental Assumptions of the Liberal-Democratic Model

The 9/11 attacks in 2001 marked the beginning of the crisis, highlighting the limitations of the state’s ability to address its citizens’ core needs: personal security, economic prosperity, and national security. Four key assumptions that underpinned the flourishing of liberal democracy in the prosperous 1990s have since been shaken:

1. **The Principle of Civil Rights:** For decades, it was widely believed that granting full civil rights and complete equality for all individuals within a state, alongside economic welfare, would prevent violence. However, 9/11 and the subsequent wave of Islamist

terrorism on the international stage undermined this belief. Paradoxically, citizens who had benefited from the fruits of liberal democracy turned against it. Islamist terrorism in Europe, combined with a large wave of immigration, led many to reconsider core principles—acceptance, inclusion, and economic welfare for immigrants—as they proved inadequate in preventing violent extremism. It became evident that religious and tribal identity—often referred to as “identity politics”—is deeper and stronger than the Western concept of the nation-state.

2. **Globalization:** The premise of globalization was that it would enhance economic efficiency and security by enabling technology-driven production in the cheapest locations and facilitating safe, low-cost transportation of goods worldwide. Globalization has diminished the significance of national borders, and as supply chains have become increasingly complex—spanning multiple countries—they have created mutual dependencies that necessitate stability, thereby increasing security. However, the COVID-19 pandemic served as a wake-up call: The global crisis exposed the fragility of supply chains. Prolonged lockdowns in China led to severe disruptions in the supply of consumer goods, while security agencies realized that national security, in all its aspects, also depends on the stability of these supply chains.
3. **War:** A widespread assumption held that wars aimed at redrawing borders had become a thing of the past and that the use of force to alter borders or impose one nation’s political vision on another was no longer viable. Even if human nature tends toward conflict, it was believed that warfare itself had changed—no more tanks storming European capitals or barbaric assaults on civilians for the purpose of mass murder, rape, and abduction. Once again, experts were proven wrong. The Russia–Ukraine war and Hamas’s brutal attack on peaceful civilians within the sovereign and internationally recognized territory of Israel shattered this assumption.
4. **Truth:** It was assumed that citizens in a democracy elect their representatives based on personal judgment, shaped by their ability to discern the truth. Moreover, science and the relentless pursuit of truth were expected to drive technological progress, with professional authorities ensuring reliability. Truth and free access to information were meant to empower individuals, enabling them to understand reality and make informed decisions in a proper democratic process. However, the era of personal technological disruption—ushered in by the advent of the iPhone—has upended this paradigm. Today, individual consciousness is shaped by algorithms. Biology has not kept pace with technological change. People exist in echo chambers, fall prey to conspiracy theories and sophisticated scams, and even struggle to distinguish between humans and machines. The free flow of information allows both misinformation and malicious content to spread, making individuals in a democracy less independent in forming their opinions.

The sobering reality is that liberal democracy no longer guarantees personal security, economic prosperity, national security, or even the free formation of opinions (assuming such a phenomenon exists). In response to these challenges, all Western democratic states are

developing two complementary strategies: an outward-facing strategy and an inward-facing strategy.

Principles of the External Strategy

- In response to threats to personal security: Address migration issues at their source. In response to migration from Africa, implement job creation initiatives on the continent. To address migration from the Middle East, tackle the root causes of the waves of refugees—wars within and between states, as well as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.
- In response to threats from globalization: Build international partnerships that create interdependencies across multiple trade sectors and counter states that challenge global norms and laws (such as China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea).
- In response to threats of war: Establish defense alliances—a complex network of treaties and agreements designed to strengthen both the system as a whole and the resilience of individual states.
- In response to threats to public consciousness: Implement global regulations for artificial intelligence development, establish international law enforcement mechanisms to combat fraud, enforce fact-checking oversight, and regulate social media content.

Principles of the Internal Strategy

- In response to threats to personal security: Enforce strict and restrictive immigration policies, including the deportation of undocumented residents and illegal migrants.
- In response to threats from globalization: Relocate manufacturing capabilities to sovereign national territory.
- In response to threats of war: Increase investment in defense and adopt a hawkish security doctrine that rejects the containment or mere risk management of emerging threats.
- In response to threats to public consciousness: Deregulate information, reduce bureaucratic constraints, and adopt a libertarian approach that grants individuals unrestricted access to information. Additionally, a flexible bureaucratic system should be capable of adapting to disruptive technological advancements. (The “Department of Governmental Efficiency” (DOGE), led by Elon Musk, is the ultimate realization of this strategy.)

These two strategies—outward-facing and inward-facing—compete and coexist across all Western liberal democracies. The tension between them fuels political struggles, particularly between the left and the right. Israel is no exception; its internal conflicts are merely a “local branch” of a broader global phenomenon. Inward-focused approaches are often mistakenly labeled as right-wing positions—such as policies against foreigners and restrictive immigration, a hawkish security stance, deregulation of social networks, weakening institutional media, and reducing reliance on external supply chains. Conversely, outward-

focused positions are wrongly associated with the left—such as permissive immigration policies to Israel, integration and equality for Arab citizens, press freedom, strengthening international alliances, maintaining strong ties with the United States, combating online disinformation campaigns, and a foreign policy that seeks diplomatic compromises and peace agreements.

However, this is a misinterpretation. There is no inherent connection between a person's political party affiliation and their stance on these issues. A right-leaning individual may advocate for outward-facing policies, just as a left-leaning person may support inward-focused approaches.

Trumpism is an inward-facing approach to the crisis of liberal democracies, combined with a business-oriented approach to diplomacy. Therefore, understanding the reality requires an understanding of the principles of business diplomacy as practiced by President Trump:

1. **Disruptive entrepreneurship:** Tradition and normative constraints are not important. Experts and their knowledge are neither effective nor relevant; on the contrary, they limit thinking. Experienced professionals only hinder innovative initiatives, while an uninhibited entrepreneur full of ideas is intimidating because he is unpredictable.
2. **A business-oriented approach to international relations:** “It’s just business”—the emotions of others, heritage, history, conventional norms, and even ideological principles are all negotiable. Everything can be traded, and everything boils down to a cost-benefit analysis.
3. **Aggressiveness:** The world understands only power. Strength is meaningless unless it is demonstrated or used. According to this perspective, the United States is strong only if it is willing to leverage its pressure points. The purpose of power is not necessarily to provoke conflict but to avoid it by bending the will of others to secure the desired deal on more favorable terms.

Based on these principles, Trump's proposal to relocate Gaza's population—and perhaps even to impose American control over the Gaza Strip—can be understood. It is unlikely a mere slip of the tongue but rather a calculated move. It is also not a trial balloon or a bargaining chip. From President Trump's perspective, if the initiative succeeds—great; but even if it does not, merely introducing the idea in a decisive manner shakes up the system and breaks the deadlock. The proposal is a prime example of the Trumpist approach:

1. **Disruptive entrepreneurship:** The proposal follows a logical conclusion based on data while disregarding historical context. According to UNRWA's official figures, 70% of Gaza's residents are refugees, and the refugee camps have been completely destroyed. If one ignores historical grievances, people's connection to their homes, international norms, and well-known Middle Eastern sensitivities, then relocating the refugees would not harm them—on the contrary.
2. **A business-oriented approach:** From a real estate perspective, the Gaza Strip is an asset that cannot be rebuilt in its current state. If the displaced residents are provided with an alternative location, the land can be redeveloped with high-quality

construction. With this approach, everyone benefits: Gazans will receive an improved alternative place to live, Hamas will cease to exist as a military-political entity in Gaza, Israel will no longer face any security threats from the Strip, and the new residents of “New Gaza” will enjoy modern infrastructure.

3. **Aggressiveness:** The aggressiveness in negotiations is reflected in an opening position that shocks the opposing side. Presenting a radical idea—one that outrages Egypt and Jordan and threatens their security—offers them only bad options, forcing them into a new reality where they seek the least harmful alternative for their involvement in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. For example, if Jordan had previously rejected a Jordanian–Palestinian federation outright, it might now see it as preferable to the idea of Jordan becoming the Palestinian state. Similarly, Egypt, which has consistently refused any responsibility for Gaza in past negotiations with Israel, may now find even Egyptian sovereignty over Gaza more appealing than the prospect of a million unemployed Palestinians crowding into Cairo. Finally, if Saudi Arabia conditions normalization with Israel on the establishment of a Palestinian state, then perhaps preventing the mass expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza could serve as an adequate concession for formalizing diplomatic ties with Israel.

There is considerable doubt that Trump’s initiative will result in a mass exodus of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip (although many in Israel, across the political spectrum, secretly or even openly hope for it). However, since Arab states would perceive such an exodus as a “Nakba 2.0” and strongly oppose it (if ineffectively), and given that the global community struggles to handle migration and mass displacement, this scenario seems unlikely at present. What is certain, however, is that this is a calculated move—introducing a far-reaching idea that will force all “experts” and relevant players in the Middle East, and possibly beyond, to rethink their positions.

Incidentally, this is precisely how the Abraham Accords were formulated. Trump’s team first presented the “Deal of the Century,” which proposed a Palestinian state on 70% of the West Bank in the framework of land swaps with Israel in the Negev, amounting to an additional 30%. Although impractical for implementation, this plan created legitimacy for Israel’s annexation of the Jordan Valley. “Minutes” before executing this radical plan, the United Arab Emirates intervened; Trump’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner, had proposed an alternative idea of postponing annexation for four years in exchange for a peace agreement with Israel.

Many on the Israeli right see Trump’s worldview as an opportunity—a political-ideological framework that could enable the continuation of the war in Gaza, support the destruction of Iran’s nuclear program, and marginalize the Palestinian issue on the international stage (even if not regionally). This outcome is possible but far from guaranteed. Trump’s defining policy remains singular—to “Make America Great Again” (MAGA). This policy prioritizes interests over values, isolationism over alliances, and pragmatic, power-based relations between states. As long as Israeli and American interests align, this should not pose a problem for Israel. However, the first time a conflict arises, Trump will not handle it politely, as the Biden administration did when tensions arose between the United States and Israel. The potential

for conflict is significant, as the US administration currently views three key issues differently from Israel:

- A preference, as of now, to fully complete the hostage deal rather than resume the war in Gaza.
- A preference for a “very good deal” with Iran over an attack on its nuclear facilities and another war in the Middle East.
- A strong emphasis on securing peace between Israel and Saudi Arabia, even if achieving it requires Israeli flexibility on the Palestinian issue.

Conclusion

President Trump’s proposal for rebuilding and stabilizing the Gaza Strip—which fully reflects his aggressive, business–real estate-oriented, and disruptive approach, both in theory and practice—is a disruptive move, even if Trump himself is uncertain about its implementation. From his perspective, if the plan succeeds and Gaza is emptied of its inhabitants and rebuilt as the “Riviera of the Middle East”—all the better. If not, the very act of introducing the idea has already created a ripple effect, challenging fundamental assumptions, increasing flexibility, altering the declared interests of Middle Eastern states, and expanding the range of options for resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which has been trapped for too long in a cycle of unworkable ideas.

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