

## BEYOND EUROPE



© Shutterstock.com

| US President Trump's policy in Israel-Palestine is aligning with forces that openly disdain the peace process, says Lara Friedman.

## EUROPE'S ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN POLICY IN THE TRUMP ERA

by Lara Friedman

Since the 1978 Israel-Egypt Camp David accords, it has been a sine qua non of Middle East diplomatic wisdom that US leadership is essential to Israeli-Arab peacemaking. Neither Europe's central role in the 1991 Madrid Conference nor America's conspicuous absence from the talks that gave birth to the 1993 Oslo Accords altered this understanding. Indeed, a defining characteristic of the post-Oslo era was the emergence of America not merely as the leader of peace efforts, but with a de facto monopoly over them.

**F**ifty years after the start of the Occupation and twenty-four years after Oslo, the historical record suggests that this American leadership has been a failure. Irrespective of intentions, US led efforts have done more to enable the

entrenchment, expansion, and permanence of occupation than to end it. And nine months into his presidency, Donald Trump has not proven to be the breath of fresh air that many had hoped that he would be, despite his brash confidence in his ability to achieve the "ultimate deal".

### Support for 'Greater Israel' enterprise

Trump hasn't moved the US embassy to Jerusalem, but the likelihood that he will do so remains acute. His administration has expressed mild reservations about settlements,

but with winks and nods it has given a green light for their expansion. With the political equivalent of dog whistles, Trump is sending clear messages of support for the Israeli Right's "Greater Israel" enterprise: in May, Trump's ambassador to Israel, longtime settlement supporter David

“  
**EUROPE MUST COME TO TERMS  
 WITH THE FACT THAT,  
 FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE,  
 IT CANNOT COUNT ON  
 WASHINGTON TO LEAD  
 RESPONSIBLY (...)  
 ON ISRAEL-PALESTINE.**

Friedman, became the first such ambassador to attend a social occasion (a wedding) in a settlement; in July, settler leaders were for the first time invited to the embassy's Independence Day party; and in August, Ambassador Friedman publicly questioned the existence of the "alleged occupation."

As a practical matter, Trump's policy on Israel-Palestine is aligning with forces that openly disdain the peace process and reject the principles and goals upon which it was established, high regard for Trump's Special Envoy, Jason Greenblatt, notwithstanding. The results speak for themselves, from settlement activities of a scope and nature not witnessed in years – including the first official new West Bank settlement in almost two decades and game-changing

new developments in East Jerusalem – to increased attacks on free speech and Israel's civil society sector.

### Europe can't count on the US to lead for now

Europe must come to terms with the fact that, for the foreseeable future, it cannot count on Washington to lead responsibly, or even to be a responsible actor, on Israel-Palestine. American policies are already increasingly at odds with international consensus and international law, as exemplified by U.S. efforts to block the application of international law and United Nations resolutions regarding settlements. Europe must grasp, too, a corollary reality: the 'peace process' can no longer constitute the core focus

of a credible European foreign policy on Israel-Palestine. Given the march of facts on the ground and the illiberal winds blowing in Israel and the United States, focusing today on bringing the parties back to the negotiating table and resuscitating the diplomatic process smacks of delusion.

### Europe needs to defend its core principles

Going forward, the imperative is for Europe is to identify its equities in Israel-Palestine and double down on efforts to defend them. These equities include upholding and demanding respect for international law, European law, and the role of the United Nations; preserving the viability of the two-state solution, which remains the only realistic possibility for ending the conflict; and promoting respect for human rights and civil liberties. By standing up for such equities, Europe is already today the most important force preventing erasure of the Green Line and the normalisation of occupation, and defending the shared values that have historically been at the core of Europe's ties with Israel. Crucial policies already in place, and which must be defended, include differentiating between sovereign Israel and the Occupied Territories, refusing to legitimise "settlement blocs" (which are as illegal as any other settlements), rejecting the delegitimation of Israeli and Palestinian civil society actors, supporting Palestinian communities in the 60% of the West Bank that is under full

Israeli control ("Area C"), and challenging Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip.

As underscored by the current challenges posed by extremism and refugees, Europe is more directly affected by instability and insecurity in the Middle East than the United States. Europe is not looking to clash with America over Israel-Palestine issues, but, as with climate change and nuclear non-proliferation policy, Israel-Palestine is another area of increasing divergence between Europe and the United States. By standing up for its equities in the Israel-Palestine arena, Europe – acting as a single body, as nations in ad hoc groupings, or even as individual states – can play a more consequential and constructive role than ever in stabilising the situation on the ground and preserving the hope for peace.



### > AUTHOR

**Lara Friedman** is President of the Foundation for Middle East Peace. Previously she was Director of Policy and Government Relations at Americans for Peace Now, and before that she served in the Middle East as a US diplomat.