

# Donald Trump's Return Could Bring a More Peaceful Middle East

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Articles & Testimony

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**A look at how his new administration might combine old and new policies to tamp down the past year of war and address other threats.**

**D**espite the handwringing angst of global leaders, the returning Trump Administration has the potential to accomplish something far more balanced and lasting in the Middle East: to ultimately bring to life the dream of a more peaceful and prosperous future for the entire region, benefitting Muslims and Jews alike.

Here are three specific areas where Trump's return could help advance a much-needed, new vision for stability in

the Middle East and usher in a new era of peace and prosperity in the region.

We don't mean to imply that Trump has a magic wand or a messianic approach to compel, as [prophesied by Isaiah 11:6 \(https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/Isaiah%2011%3A6\)](https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/Isaiah%2011%3A6), the wolf to immediately lay down with the lamb; in fact, the immediate next steps will involve some forceful, decisive actions.

## **Choke Iranian revenues and funding of regional terrorist groups through the long overdue re-enforcement of oil sanctions**

Iran's brutal theocratic government is a malignant influence on its neighbors and on its own people, and the single largest threat to regional harmony as the biggest funder of terrorism in the Middle East. Oil sales are the [most crucial \(https://time.com/7027530/israel-missile-attack-iran-oil-sanctions/\)](https://time.com/7027530/israel-missile-attack-iran-oil-sanctions/) source of funding for the Iranian regime, representing up to 70% of all government revenues. During the first Trump Administration, under the leadership of Iran Special Envoy Brian Hook, a heightened focus on U.S. government enforcement—including directly seizing countless Iranian oil tankers and [even emailing ship captains directly \(https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-49589075\)](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-49589075)—reduced the volume of Iranian oil exports by 95%, from 2.5 million barrels a day in 2018 to a low of [only 70,000 barrels a day \(https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-wont-biden-enforce-sanctions-against-iranian-oil-ccdac920\)](https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-wont-biden-enforce-sanctions-against-iranian-oil-ccdac920) in 2020, cutting Iranian oil revenues by approximately \$50 billion. The lost oil supply was easily replaced by increased production from the Gulf countries, led by Saudi Arabia, so global oil prices fell, ensuring the cost was borne by Iran alone and not by consumers.

However, enforcement of these highly effective sanctions lapsed during the Biden Administration, for a variety of reasons, which has led Iran to reap [windfall profits \(https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-wont-biden-enforce-sanctions-against-iranian-oil-ccdac920\)](https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-wont-biden-enforce-sanctions-against-iranian-oil-ccdac920) from near-record oil production, doubling from less than 2 million barrels per day in 2019 to nearly 4 million barrels per day now, and with oil exports increasing from practically zero to nearly 2 million barrels per day—equivalent to [over \\$100 billion \(https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-wont-biden-enforce-sanctions-against-iranian-oil-ccdac920\)](https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-wont-biden-enforce-sanctions-against-iranian-oil-ccdac920) in profits.

Trump comes in with substantially stronger relations with key Gulf oil producing countries and with the U.S. domestic energy industry, and as such, he will have a much stronger hand to enforce sanctions without driving up global energy prices, and the days of Iran reaping windfall profits from oil sales are clearly over. There is simply no way for Iran to replace any of this lost revenue, which means less money for the Ayatollah to fund Iran's terrorism and antisemitic jihads.

## **Stop Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon, which is the gravest long-term regional security threat facing the Mideast**

A nuclear Iran remains the gravest long-term regional security threat facing Israel, the Middle East, and the United States, and the returning Trump Administration will have to make stopping Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon in its tracks one of its highest priorities.

Over the last four years, Iran has drawn dramatically closer to nuclear breakout capability—even as western diplomats [unsuccessfully pursued \(https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/bidens-iran-envoy-wanted-a-nuclear-deal-it-may-have-cost-him-his-career-2b705879\)](https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/bidens-iran-envoy-wanted-a-nuclear-deal-it-may-have-cost-him-his-career-2b705879) a renewed Iran nuclear deal. When those talks finally, predictably collapsed, even top Pentagon officials [candidly conceded \(https://edition.cnn.com/2023/02/28/politics/kahl-iran-nuclear-deal/index.html\)](https://edition.cnn.com/2023/02/28/politics/kahl-iran-nuclear-deal/index.html) that [Iran could soon assemble a crude nuclear device \(https://edition.cnn.com/2023/02/28/politics/kahl-iran-nuclear-deal/index.html\)](https://edition.cnn.com/2023/02/28/politics/kahl-iran-nuclear-deal/index.html) within weeks. Indeed, Iran stands today as essentially a nuclear threshold state, with a stockpile of several bombs' worth of highly enriched uranium to 60%, which is very close to weapons grade. In one case, the Iranians said they supposedly mistakenly enriched a small amount of material to 83.7%. For comparison, the

Hiroshima bomb was based on 80% enrichment.

The returning Trump Administration is poised to re-prioritize Iranian nuclear disarmament, in place of a diplomatic approach which paradoxically enabled Iran's march to the bomb. While the Iran nuclear deal may still be hotly debated in some circles, what is not remotely debatable is that over the last few years, Iran has both drawn closer to a bomb and reaped the benefits financially of weaker sanctions enforcement.

That said, there is another important development: Israel has dramatically weakened Iran's proxies and Iran's strategic defenses. It is now largely unshackled from the key restraints which had previously constrained its ability to take direct action against Iran's nuclear facilities despite weak air defense systems—the presence of Hezbollah, Hamas, and other Iran-backed proxies as threats on Israel's borders. With these proxy groups having been significantly degraded now thanks to the ingenuity of the Israelis, sometimes in defiance of western governments (<https://www.hindustantimes.com/videos/macron-chides-netanyahu-over-lebanon-ground-op-furious-israeli-pm-hits-back-watch-101729085596324.html>), countering Iran's nuclear program becomes much more readily achievable.

The timing is perfect for the Trump Administration and for the U.S.; Iran is already de facto at war with Israel, and together, the U.S. and Israel have the tools it needs to complete the disarmament of Iran's nuclear program by any means necessary; or at the very bare minimum, that threat to Iran's nuclear infrastructure should give the Trump Administration significant leverage.

## **Extend the Abraham Accords to build a strong coalition of allies to counter the Axis of Evil and facilitate a better life for the Palestinian people**

On top of the horrific slaughter of over 1,200 innocent civilians in Israel and hostages dragged through the streets of Gaza, plus the tens of thousands of innocent Palestinian and Israeli civilians who have been killed in reprisals since then; there is another underappreciated if less vivid tragedy arising from October 7<sup>th</sup>. The subsequent regional conflict which has engulfed the Middle East derailed (<https://time.com/6323908/israel-hamas-war-middle-east-peace/>) the planned next phase of the Abraham Accords: Saudi Arabia—the home of Mecca, the spiritual and symbolic center of Islam—would have followed Bahrain, UAE, Morocco, and Sudan in normalizing relations with Israel and in consecrating a new, transformative alliance to counter the malignant influence of Iran and its “Axis of Evil.”

It's not that the Biden Administration didn't try to get a deal done. In fact, Hamas's attacks on October 7<sup>th</sup> were driven, in part, by the Hamas objective of derailing planned normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel. The death and destruction in Gaza subsequently altered the environment for peace making and gave the Saudis a need to show that they are delivering a better future for the Palestinians.

With the return of Trump, there is, this time, the very real chance that Saudi Arabia will eventually recognize Israel's existence, even if not right now. In the meantime, the transformative economic, social, and diplomatic fruits of the Abraham Accords are already paying off in plain sight, in stark juxtaposition to a defanged, struggling Iran and Iran-backed terrorist infernos largely extinguished. As Jared Kushner, the architect of the Abraham Accords, put it, “Iranian leadership is stuck in the old Middle East, while their neighbors in the GCC are sprinting toward the future by investing in their populations and infrastructure. They are becoming dynamic magnets for talent and investment while Iran falls further behind.” Simply put, the more the people of the region accept Israel's existence; the more economic ties are formed between Israel and Arab nations, which leads to shared prosperity for all inhabitants of the region, and the harder it becomes for Tehran to assert dominance.

That shared prosperity extends to the Palestinian people, who have been deprived of economic opportunity for too

long. Moving forward, no political peace will be sustainable without economic prosperity. As outlined in Jared Kushner's [original 'Peace to Prosperity' conference \(https://insights.som.yale.edu/insights/the-bahrain-conference-what-the-experts-and-the-media-missed\)](https://insights.som.yale.edu/insights/the-bahrain-conference-what-the-experts-and-the-media-missed) in Bahrain in 2018; public and private partnerships could unleash conservatively \$50 billion in economic development for the Palestinian people, including a \$5 billion highway and economic development corridor connecting Gaza and the West Bank. Private sector leaders and top Arab investors told us that they would never invest in Gaza as long as Hamas remained in power, despite their enthusiasm for the potential of Gaza and its potential economic advantages, but the substantive elimination of Hamas promises new opportunities for Palestinian prosperity through public-private investment alongside the political stabilization of the Palestinian territories, possibly through a joint Arab stabilization force—something that can create the basis for an interim administration in Gaza for the period after the war.

In short, the simplistic narrative that the return of Trump will merely equate with fortification of Netanyahu's militarism to the detriment of regional stability in the Middle East misses the greatest opportunity of all. The weakening of Iran's axis of evil creates the opportunity for the Trump Administration to firmly turn the entire Middle East towards a more peaceful and prosperous future, benefitting all the inhabitants of the region, Muslims and Jews alike, while advancing US interests.

Some pundits wondered how Arab-American voters in Michigan and elsewhere could vote in droves for Trump despite his staunch support for Israel, but perhaps they should have remembered Quran 8:61: "If they incline to peace, then you should incline to it; and put your trust in God; He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing." A new dawn and a new era of peace and prosperity could be on the horizon in the Middle East with Trump's return.

*This article was originally published on the Time Magazine website (<https://time.com/7174666/donald-trump-return-could-bring-a-more-peaceful-middle-east/>). ❖*

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