

# A Mideast Peace Gameplan for Trump

by [Dennis Ross \(/experts/dennis-ross\)](#), [David Makovsky \(/experts/david-makovsky\)](#)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



### [Dennis Ross \(/experts/dennis-ross\)](#)

Dennis Ross, a former special assistant to President Barack Obama, is the counselor and William Davidson Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute.



### [David Makovsky \(/experts/david-makovsky\)](#)

David Makovsky is the Ziegler distinguished fellow at The Washington Institute and director of the Koret Project on Arab-Israel Relations.



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**The president should apply pressure on all sides, urging the Israelis to stop building beyond the security barrier, demanding that Palestinians end incitement to terrorism, and calling for Arabs to admit, at long last, that West Jerusalem is part of Israel.**

**P**resident Trump is making his first foreign trip in the coming days. While the stop in Saudi Arabia will likely focus on Saudi Arabia and other threats, Israeli-Palestinian peace will also be on the agenda given the President's interest in striking what he calls "the ultimate deal."

The conflict between Arabs and Jews, Arabs and Israelis dates at least from 1917, when Britain recognized the importance of creating a Jewish homeland in historic Palestine. True peace agreements have been reached between Israel and Egypt, and Israel and Jordan, but the existential conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, which pits two national movements against each other for the same space, has continued. It is not as if American Presidents have not tried to resolve it. Since 2000 alone, the U.S. has made three major efforts to end the conflict. The gaps between the two sides on the core issues -- borders, security arrangements, refugees, Jerusalem, and mutual recognition of the character of the other side's state -- have not been bridgeable.

Should that mean giving up? No. If the past tells us anything, it is that walking away only creates a vacuum that is filled by those most opposed to peace and fosters the very disbelief on the part of both publics that compounds the challenge of any peacemaking effort. Making a dent in that culture of disbelief is essential if progress is to be made --

meaning, even though the Trump administration cannot solve the conflict now, it should focus on restoring a sense of possibility. Focus on hitting a single, not a home run.

Where? On the issues that singularly undermine the trust of the respective sides. For Palestinians, this means ensuring that Israel's settlement policy is made consistent with a two-state solution: no settling outside the security barrier, where only approximately a fifth of the settlers live. By the same token, the Israelis must see that the Palestinians get serious about fighting incitement to terror -- by ending the payments of "martyrs' foundations" to terrorists who kill innocent civilians. Broker that kind of agreement, with one meaningful deliverable for both sides, and hope would begin to come back into focus.

President Trump should also be asking something bigger of Arab leaders. Certainly with the Sunni Arab leaders of the Mideast, he has leverage. They desperately want the U.S. to remain engaged in the region against their biggest threat: Iran. Given that, he could seek with them to create a new baseline on Jerusalem.

In an interview early this week, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson put the relocation of the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem squarely in the context of peacemaking. He said Israel should decide whether it could further the peace process or whether it would be a distraction. The issue is bound to come to a head shortly. On June 1, Trump will be faced with a requirement of legislation dating from 1995 that mandates the relocation of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem unless the President signs a national security waiver. Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama signed the waiver every six months since the legislation was adopted. The Trump administration has already signaled that on this visit, it won't be announcing an imminent relocation of the embassy. But other than those who challenge Israel's very existence, no one disputes that West Jerusalem is and will always be part of Israel. Isn't it time to align perception with reality? Isn't it time to ask the large number of Arab leaders who will be assembled in Saudi Arabia to meet Trump to acknowledge this reality, even as they will certainly claim East Jerusalem for the Palestinians?

It is noteworthy that without any fanfare, Moscow announced last month that Russia recognized West Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Arab states have also implied it in their Arab Peace Initiative, which calls on Israel to withdraw to the June 4, 1967, lines -- lines that would mean West Jerusalem is part of Israel.

Trump should be willing to challenge both sides directly -- pressing the Israelis to stop building beyond the security barrier, while demanding that Palestinians end incitement of terror, and Arabs at long last admit that West Jerusalem is part of Israel.

*Dennis Ross is the counselor and William Davidson Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute and author of [Doomed to Succeed: The U.S.-Israel Relationship From Truman to Obama](#).*

*<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/doomed-to-succeed> David Makovsky is the Institute's Ziegler Distinguished Fellow and director of its Project on the Middle East Peace Process. ❖*

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