

14 novembre (NYT)

[Opinion | Israel Needs a Biden Peace Plan - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com)

OPINION

THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

It's Time for a Biden Peace Plan

Nov. 14, 2023, 1:00 a.m. ET



Credit...Ronen Zvulun/Reuters

By [Thomas L. Friedman](#) Opinion Columnist, reporting from Tel Aviv.

During my nine days of reporting recently in Israel and the West Bank, little did I know that the most revealing moment would come in the final hours of my visit. As I was packing to leave last Saturday night, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gave a news conference in which he indicated that Israel and the United States do not have a shared vision of how Israel should complete its war in Gaza or how to convert any Israeli victory over Hamas into a lasting peace with the Palestinians.

Without such a shared strategy, the Biden administration, the American people and particularly American Jews who support Israel will need to make some fateful decisions.

We will either have to become captives of Netanyahu's strategy — which could take us all down with him — or articulate our own American vision for how the Gaza war must end. That would require a Biden administration plan to create two states for two indigenous peoples living in the areas of Gaza, the West Bank and Israel.

Yes, I am talking about a wartime peace plan that, if Israel agreed, could help give it the time, legitimacy, allies and resources it needs to defeat Hamas — without getting stuck governing all of Gaza and all of the West Bank forever, with no political horizon for the Palestinians.

And have no illusion, this is the only vision Netanyahu is offering right now: Seven million Jews trying to govern five million Palestinians in perpetuity — and that is a prescription for disaster for Israel, America, Jews everywhere and America's moderate Arab allies.

The Biden plan — are you sitting down? — could actually use as one of its starting points President Donald Trump's [proposal](#) for a two-state solution, because Netanyahu warmly embraced that in 2020, when he had a different coalition. (Netanyahu and his ambassador in Washington practically wrote the Trump plan.) More on that in a second.

Here is why we are at a juncture that demands bold ideas, starting last Saturday night. [Speaking in Hebrew](#) in the joint news conference with Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and Minister Benny Gantz, Netanyahu rejected U.S. and world concerns over the thousands of Palestinian lives already lost to the war to uproot Hamas from Gaza. Even more important, he declared that Israel's military would

remain in Gaza “as long as necessary” to prevent the Gaza Strip from ever again being used to launch attacks on Israeli civilians.

Gaza “will be demilitarized,” [he said](#). “There will be no further threat from the Gaza Strip on Israel, and to ensure that, for as long as necessary, I.D.F. will control Gaza security to prevent terror from there.”

Those are legitimate Israeli concerns given the Hamas atrocities, but Netanyahu also indicated that Israel would oppose the return of the Palestinian Authority — Israel’s partner in the Oslo peace process that governs Palestinians in the West Bank — to Gaza following the war. The authority, Netanyahu said, is “a civil authority that educates its children to hate Israel, to kill Israelis, to eliminate the State of Israel ... an authority that pays the families of murderers based on the number they murdered ... an authority whose leader still has not condemned the terrible [Oct. 7] massacre 30 days later.” Bibi — who never gives the Palestinian Authority credit for how it works every day with Israeli security officials to dampen violence in the West Bank — offered no suggestion of how and from where an alternative, legitimate Palestinian governing authority ready to work with Israel might emerge.

This was an in-your-face rebuke of the Biden administration position articulated by Secretary of State Antony Blinken last Wednesday. As [The Times reported](#), Blinken declared during a meeting of foreign ministers in Tokyo that Gaza should be unified with the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority once the war is over. To retain America’s Arab and Western allies, Blinken said that right now — today — we must articulate “affirmative elements to get to a sustained peace.” And “these must include the Palestinian people’s voices and aspirations at the center of post-crisis governance in Gaza,” he said. “It must include Palestinian-led governance and Gaza unified with the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority.”

My four-word translation of Blinken’s proposal to Israel: “Help us help you.”

Blinken, though, also offered no details of how that might happen. The Biden team needs to flesh that out.

Why is Netanyahu trying to destroy the Palestinian Authority as a governing option for a postwar Gaza? Because he is already campaigning to hold onto power after the Gaza war is over, and he knows there will be a huge surge of Israelis demanding he step down because of how he and his far-right cronies distracted and divided Israel and its military by pursuing a judicial coup that [Israeli intelligence sources](#) told Netanyahu was emboldening and tempting enemies such as Hamas and Hezbollah.

The only way Netanyahu can stay in power is if his far-right allies don’t abandon him — particularly Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir. So to hold the support of the Jewish supremacists in his cabinet — some of whom want Israel to [erect settlements in Gaza](#) as soon as possible — Netanyahu has to declare now that the Palestinians will have no legitimate, independent representation in Gaza or the West Bank.

Yes, I know it is hard to believe, but Netanyahu is [campaigning](#) in the middle of this war.

It is time for President Biden to create a moment of truth for everyone — for Netanyahu, for the Palestinians and their supporters, for Israel and its supporters and for Aipac, the Jewish lobby. Biden needs to make clear that America is not going to be Netanyahu’s useful idiot. We are going to lay down the principles of a fair peace plan for the morning after this war — one that reflects *our* interests and that will also enable us to support Israel and moderate Palestinians and win the support of moderate Arabs for an economic reconstruction of Gaza after the war. I cannot see any major economic support for the rebuilding of Gaza coming from Europe or from countries like the United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia unless Israel and some legitimate Palestinian authority are committed to the principles of a peace framework to create two states for two peoples.

Biden needs to say: “Israel, we are covering your flank militarily with our two aircraft carriers, financially with \$14 billion in aid, and diplomatically at the U.N. The price for that is your acceptance of a peace framework based on two states for two indigenous peoples in Gaza, the West Bank and pre-1967 Israel. This plan is based on U.N. Resolutions 242 and 338, which was also the cornerstone for negotiations in the [peace plan put forward](#) by President Trump in 2020.

“Bibi, do you remember what you said about that Trump plan that gave Palestinians about 70 percent of the West Bank for a state, plus an expanded Gaza Strip and a capital in the area of Jerusalem?” Biden could add. “Here’s the Associated Press [story](#) of Jan. 28, 2020, to remind you: ‘Netanyahu called it a “historic breakthrough” equal in significance to the country’s declaration of independence in 1948.’”

The Palestinian Authority foolishly rejected the Trump plan outright, instead of asking to use it as a starting point. This is a chance to make up for that mistake — or be exposed as unserious.

In his valuable new book on the history of the peace process, “[\(In\) Sights: Peacemaking in the Oslo Process Thirty Years and Counting](#),” Gidi Grinstein, a member of Ehud Barak’s negotiating team at Camp David, argues that the Trump plan provides a natural foundation for a revived peace process for a two-state solution. That is not only because Netanyahu already agreed to it, Grinstein told me in an interview, even if the settler hard-liners in his cabinet did not and still would not. It’s also viable because the Trump plan was actually based on the precondition that peace was possible only after Hamas was removed from power in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority could assume control of the Gaza Strip, which, the Trump plan argued, would be expanded by land carved from Israel’s Negev Desert.

President Biden could also propose that with the help of our moderate Arab allies like the U.A.E., Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Bahrain, we would come up with a plan to overhaul the Palestinian Authority, purge its education system of anti-Israel material, upgrade its forces that work daily with Israeli security teams in the West Bank, and phase out its financial support for Palestinian prisoners who harmed Israelis.

Is the Palestinian Authority up to such a deal? Are progressive Palestinian supporters in the West who chant the eliminationist mantra “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” up for it? Will Israel’s silent majority be if Hamas is defeated? Let’s see what everyone really stands for — or if they have a better answer — because neither is going to disappear. Biden needs to put them all to the test.

I know that a lot of American Jewish leaders privately would love Biden to put forward such a plan but so far only one, Ronald Lauder, a longtime Republican and president of the World Jewish Congress, has had the courage to call for it — in a Saudi newspaper, no less, in [an essay](#) entitled: “A time for peace and a two-state solution.” As he explained: “Only a two-state solution would guarantee Israelis and Palestinians a life in dignity, safety and with a better perspective on the economic situation, which would lead to a sustainable future.”

Such a plan would protect America’s interests — and make clear that we care about what’s best for Israelis and Palestinians and our allies in the region, not what’s best for Bibi’s political future — which several Israeli [analysts](#) told me would be to drag out the war, so he couldn’t be ousted by mass demonstrations — or to drag us into a conflict with Iran in hopes that would overshadow all his mistakes.

If a two-state plan were embraced by Israel, even with reservations, it would reinforce for the world that Israel sees its war in Gaza as one of necessary self-defense and a prelude to lasting peace. And if such a plan were embraced by the Palestinian Authority, even with reservations, that would reinforce that the authority intends to be the alternative to Hamas in shaping an independent future for Palestinians alongside Israel — and that it will not be a bystander to Hamas’s madness or a victim of it.

Thomas L. Friedman is the foreign affairs Opinion columnist. He joined the paper in 1981 and has won three Pulitzer Prizes. He is the author of seven books, including "From Beirut to Jerusalem," which won the National Book Award.