Alternatives to the Trump “Peace for Prosperity” Vision for a Palestine State

Opinion polls of Israelis and of Palestinians indicate that a two state Palestine is still the choice of a plurality of both peoples – the other choices being “one state” or the status quo. The publics have not been a driving force for peace. Their elected leaders have failed to negotiate on borders, settlements, East Jerusalem, the right of return, security for Israel.

In this vacuum enters the Trump “Peace for Prosperity” vision. It offers the Palestinians a reduced “Swiss cheese” territory riddled with enclaves, access roads and bridges for Israelis, annexation of most settlements and of the Jordan valley, a Jerusalem “capital” that is a slum village, possible land swaps that pushes Israeli Arabs out of Israel and leaves thousands of Palestinians in Jerusalem with residence permits but no citizenship, no recognition of the right of return, the disbanding of Hamas associated militias and weaponry, and the prospect of multibillion dollar investments from mostly the Gulf states.

The vision has been rejected by Palestinian leaders and is not likely to be the basis for negotiations by others. Nevertheless the Trump initiative deals with several real issues that will have to be resolved in any peace agreement such as security for Israel, the future of the Israeli settlements, and economic development for the Palestine state. On these issues there are alternative variations and options to the Trump vision that make a peace deal negotiable.

1. Hamas and other militants will have to give up violence and disarm, as the Irish Republican Army did in the Northern Ireland Peace Agreement. The international community has been the unintended enabler of Hamas violence by assuming responsibility for education, health, welfare in Gaza, relieving Hamas of the burden of providing for the people’s welfare, and providing resources for the “tunnel and rocket economy” enabling warfare against Israel. Hamas does not pay for the cost of violent conflict against Israel. Controls on international funding and supplies for the Gaza people’s welfare will have to block diversion to violent activities. The goal is to pressure Hamas to become a peaceful political party as Sinn Fein has in Northern Ireland, renouncing its IRA wing.

2. Israel will not forcefully evacuate the Jewish settlements and will not risk an IDF-settler civil war. There is another option: long term leases to settlements by the Palestinian state, and Israeli law there.
3. Financial compensation will be provided in lieu of the right of return. Settlement lease money to the Palestinian state will be partly allocated to compensation, partly to economic development managed by funds under international supervision.

4. East Jerusalem can be the capital of the new state. “Jerusalem, one city, two capitals” institutions will be worked out by Israeli, Palestinian and international experts. The goal is to have a unified city and not an East Berlin/West Berlin divided entity.

5. Security in the Jordan valley against the incursion of terrorists and weapons will be continued, but with joint participation; alternatively the Palestinian state can lease the land to Israel for security purposes, and continue security operations.

6. The Palestinian state has to become viable, instead of a failed state. A viable peaceful Palestinian neighbor is in Israel’s best interest. Billions will have to be invested for economic development, as in the Trump vision, but the Palestinian state will not prosper on its own; multiple economic ties and cooperation on water, energy and resources management with Israel will have to be instituted. Together with Palestinian labor migration and joint industries, the new Palestinian state can achieve a far better living and future for its people that is the case now.