FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY 02.10.2025 | René Wildangel

How do wars end?

Trump's plan for peace in Gaza was drafted without key parties, then presented with ultimatums — hardly a foundation for lasting peace

How do wars end? A rather banal but empirically verifiable finding from peace and conflict research is that peace treaties have a better chance of being upheld if they have been negotiated as concretely and carefully as possible. Measured by this standard, the pompously announced 'Trump plan' for 'eternal peace' is a farce: drawn up largely without the conflicting parties, at the discretion of the President and his confidants. At least one party, Hamas, was not even consulted beforehand, but was asked to agree to it afterwards by means of an ultimatum.

At the very least, the plan includes the possibility of an 'amnesty' for those Hamas leaders who lay down their arms. This approach could have been pursued months ago, but instead Netanyahu and his allies consistently spoke of the complete 'destruction' of Hamas — an unrealistic and nonsensical goal from the outset, as Hamas is not only a militia but also a broadly based political and social movement. Worse still, Israel has actively thwarted attempts at negotiation in recent months, even bombing a Hamas negotiating delegation in Doha. This may have been the point at which Trump felt compelled to intervene, after tolerating and supporting Israel's devastating offensive for months.

However, after the publication of the 'Trump plan,' Israel's disastrous military operation in Gaza City continued. Massive attacks, increasingly carried out by automated weapon systems, are destroying the few remaining medical and humanitarian facilities and civilian infrastructure; the catastrophic supply situation makes survival virtually impossible for the remaining civilians — a situation that, according to all major human rights organisations and most recently a UN commission of inquiry, constitutes genocide.

Supreme peacemaker

The dystopian situation in Gaza and the monstrosity of the crimes

committed there by the Israeli army are probably the reason why Trump's somewhat bizarre plan immediately became the last glimmer of hope for finally ending the Gaza war: an immediate ceasefire, full humanitarian aid, and the instant return of all Israeli hostages — these are long-overdue and justified demands in this plan, which must be supported unconditionally.

And yet, the numerous other passages of the '20-point plan' are either extremely vague or contain highly problematic proposals that do not point towards détente or even conflict resolution. The fact that, among others, the German Foreign Minister Wadephul praised the plan as a 'unique opportunity' and effusively thanked the US President is therefore not only surprising but also dangerous. The plan has nothing to do with the parameters for conflict resolution advocated by the EU. Wadephul and his EU colleagues would be well advised to make a clear distinction here: support for the initiative for a ceasefire, humanitarian aid and the release of hostages; clear demarcation from the rest of the plan and, instead, clear communication of the parameters for the further political process.

At this point, it is also worth recalling Donald Trump's last 'groundbreaking' Middle East plan, the modestly titled 'Deal of the Century' from his first term in office in 2020. The plan, which was largely conceived by his son-in-law Jared Kushner, was a similarly one-sided piece of work as the latest initiative. Trump's actions at the time, which included recognising Israel's sovereignty over Palestinian East Jerusalem and abandoning the classic US criticism of the settlement movement, had the effect of massively exacerbating the conflict. This led, among other things, to widespread violence in East Jerusalem. The fact that Trump now wants to offer himself once again as an honest broker in the Middle East conflict is hard to beat in terms of chutzpah. After all, the Israeli military operation in Gaza would hardly have been possible without extensive US military and financial aid.

The Arab League had already adopted its own plan in March, which also provided for a ceasefire and reconstruction.

The plan was presumably coordinated with close US allies in the Gulf, who are to contribute to an 'international stabilisation force' together with other Arab states (point 15). The Arab League had already adopted its own plan in March, which also provided for a ceasefire and reconstruction. Probably due to their influence, at least some of their demands are included, without which they would not have been able to approve the plan. Above all, the fact that the Israeli army should not

permanently occupy or annex the Gaza Strip (point 16) and that Palestinians should not be permanently expelled (point 12). This is not a matter of course, given that Trump had fantasised in February 2025 about expulsion and the creation of a 'Riviera of the Middle East'.

The prospect of the US taking possession of Gaza ('we will own it'), which was expressed in the same breath at the time, is reflected in a modified form in the plan — there is talk of a 'Board of Peace' to administer Gaza (point 9). Supreme peacemaker: Donald Trump. Tony Blair, the former British Prime Minister, who is not well regarded in the region, not only because of his decisive role in the Iraq War, but also because of his unconvincing work as Special Envoy of the 'Middle East Quartet,' is also to be involved.

Past mistakes, repeated

Even without the expulsion of the Palestinians, Trump clearly sees the coastal strip as a lucrative testing ground for his real estate deals. Under his supervision, a development plan is to be drawn up by experts who have created 'some of the modern wonder cities of the Middle East'; with the involvement of 'well-meaning international companies' that have already made 'well-thought-out investment proposals' (point 10). It is clear who Trump envisages these actors to be — his business partners at home and in the Gulf.

The Palestinians play just as little a role in the plan as their documented rights to self-determination. The ideological lens through which the Trump administration views the conflict is impressively demonstrated in the very first point: Gaza should become a 'de-radicalised terror-free zone'. The fact that Trump – himself the leader of a movement in the US that is radical in many respects – wants to subject the civilian population in Gaza, which has been deeply traumatised by two years of bombing and hunger blockade and consists mainly of children and young adults, to a 'de-radicalisation programme' speaks volumes.

The fact that Trump wants to place the Gaza Strip under a kind of US mandate is worrying and must not be accepted by

A 'technocratic, apolitical committee' is to handle day-to-day business in Gaza (point 9); the Palestinian Authority is to play no role until its 'reform has been conscientiously implemented' (point 19) — a vague formulation that can easily be used to justify its permanent exclusion and the permanent

the international community.

division of the Palestinian territory. In many respects, the vague wording of the Trump plan is reminiscent of that of the Oslo Accords concluded in 1993. Edward Said already called this a 'Palestinian Versailles' in 1993, as in his analysis Palestinian foreign rule had been continued and even legitimised under the guise of a peace process. As in Oslo, the withdrawal of the Israeli army is formulated in Trump's plan under point 18 without specific conditions or a binding timetable. Copying past mistakes seems to be the method here.

The fact that Trump wants to place the Gaza Strip under a kind of US mandate is worrying and must not be accepted by the international community. If anything, it would be the task of the United Nations to oversee a transition process; but the body that the US and Israel are jointly seeking to delegitimise does not appear in the plan, nor do international law and human rights as the basis for any conflict resolution. The United Nations is only granted a role in the distribution of aid — alongside other 'international institutions', which presumably refers to the notorious 'Gaza Humanitarian Foundation', which is partly responsible for the killing of hundreds of Palestinians seeking help.

It comes as little surprise that the central issue of accountability and legal prosecution of war crimes committed by the Israeli army and Hamas does not appear anywhere in the document — after all, Trump and Netanyahu are sabotaging the work of international courts.

The asymmetry between Israelis and Palestinians has never been greater than it is today.

The plan also says nothing about the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, settlement activity or rampant settler violence. It has always been customary in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations to freeze settlement policy, but Netanyahu has not been willing to do so for decades. He recently made clear what he thinks of a Palestinian state when he compared it to an 'Al Qaeda state' before the United Nations General Assembly. Trump's plan can only bring itself to recognise Palestinian self-determination and statehood as 'the aspiration' of the Palestinian people — a formulation that lags decades behind international recognition of Palestinian claims.

The asymmetry between Israelis and Palestinians has never been greater than it is today. Trump's concluding point, to soon establish a 'dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians to create a political horizon for a future of peace and prosperity,' is as detached from reality as the idea that the US, of all countries, can act as an 'honest broker.'

The EU has also lost much of its credibility through its inaction — it must not now stand idly by on the sidelines. It must seek international allies to make the recognised fundamental principles of international law for conflict resolution the framework for a further political process. The approach of finally responding to Israel's extremist government with real pressure and sanctions is an important counterweight to Trump's plan. If this plan becomes a blueprint in its current form, it will not only join the long list of failed initiatives, but will also produce even more violence and conflict.



René Wildangel
Berlin

Dr René Wildangel is a historian and author specialising in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. Among other roles, he has worked as an advisor at the Federal Foreign Office and in the *Bundestag*. From 2012 to 2015, he headed the Heinrich Böll Foundation's office in Ramallah. In 2022, he co-edited the book *Das Rebellische Spiel (The Rebellious Game)* with Jan Busse, which examines the World Cup in Qatar and football in the Arab world.