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Peace for sale

Trump's Board of Peace is nothing more than political theatre. Europe must tear down its curtains

Donald Trump's 'Board of Peace', which was officially launched in Davos, first appeared in the '20-point plan' for Gaza. Its primary goal, after two years, was to end the Israeli military operation and its disastrous consequences for the civilian population in Gaza. However, the role that the Board of Peace could play remained as vague as many other details.

These ambiguities also found their way into the UN resolution 2803 — probably the worst resolution the Security Council has ever passed in terms of craftsmanship, and one that largely departs from the principles of international law and diplomatic language.

After a remarkable success, the release of all Israeli hostages, the weaknesses of the plan soon became apparent in Gaza. Little changed for the people living there: no reconstruction, hardly any humanitarian aid and borders that remained effectively closed. Above all, there was no end to the war — since the beginning of the 'ceasefire', almost 500 Palestinians have been killed, including over 100 children.

The Gaza Strip is effectively divided along a yellow line marked by the Israeli army, where Palestinian civilians are repeatedly fired upon with lethal force. In the Israeli-occupied eastern part, which is estimated to cover up to 55 per cent of the territory, the army is systematically destroying the few structures that still exist. The Israeli army chief has already declared this to be 'the new border' – raising fears of permanent annexation. Two million Palestinians are thus confined to an extremely small area of approximately 160 square kilometres, most of which is covered with the rubble of destroyed homes and infrastructure.

A new Trump fan club

And what does the future hold for this area? Although the first phase of the 20-point plan has not even come close to being implemented, the US administration unveiled its plans for the second phase at the World

Economic Forum in Davos. However, it left open the question of how sustainable reconstruction can be achieved, how the Gaza Strip will be administered in the future and how the civilian population will be protected. There are also no binding agreements yet on the withdrawal of the Israeli army.

Instead, Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner presented glossy slides of futuristic skyscrapers and a master plan for the 'new Gaza' – a kind of 'Gaza Riviera 2.0' – which were probably created using artificial intelligence. Even though Kushner and Trump spoke of a better future, the wishes of the people obviously play no role; Gaza's culture, history and architecture have just as little place in the plans as a commitment to Palestinian self-determination.

Trump himself reiterated what really matters to him: 'At heart, I am a real estate agent (...) – and this is a wonderful spot for real estate.' Also presented were the other institutions that are to support him in this endeavour: in addition to the Peace Board, which Trump chairs himself, there is its executive committee and an additional 'Gaza Executive Board'. With a few exceptions, the individuals involved are close associates of Trump.

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The *National Committee for the Administration of Gaza* is to take over the administration of the Gaza Strip. However, this body has no powers, and even the ability of its members to enter and leave the territory depends on Israel. For the time being, Hamas determines the basic security and administrative structures. Hamas has declared its willingness to hand over power. However, whether progress in this direction is possible will likely depend on whether its disarmament is not only proclaimed but also negotiated, for example, through the amnesties promised in the Trump plan.

Even in the event of a formal transfer of power, Hamas would remain a political and military factor and could spoil the process at any time — making the planned presence of international military forces a highly risky undertaking. Trump's plan could then slide into a new armed conflict.

Even the so-called peace summit in Sharm El-Sheikh was a pompous farce that revolved not around peace, but solely around Donald Trump himself. The 'Peace Board' is intended to institutionalise the great

Trump peace show: with a grotesquely gilded logo focusing exclusively on America, a largely meaningless and vague ‘charter’ and another pompous launch event in Davos.

This new Trump fan club is directly opposed to the United Nations. And the money Donald Trump is seeking to acquire is not earmarked for global development and peacekeeping, but for the expansion of American hegemony, which Trump repeatedly and vociferously demands. The alliance partners include elected autocrats such as Milei and Orbán and dictators such as Putin and Lukashenko. What unites them is their hostility towards the United Nations – because the UN institutions, which are certainly not perfect, may impose sanctions and criticism on them.

A chance for Germany

The excesses of Trump’s policies are becoming increasingly bizarre, but the consequences are real. Trump has long since left key international forums such as the Paris Climate Agreement and the World Health Organisation. He dismantled the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in record time. Given this agenda aimed at destroying the rules-based world, it remains astonishing that resistance to it from Europe and also from the British government has so far been very cautious. Only after loud threats against Europe over the Greenland issue, the appeasement approach seems to be coming to an end.

At least the rejections of the ‘Peace Council’ were clear. It is obvious that the council has no future as a serious player in peacekeeping, but was created solely to advance Trump’s interests. It is possible that the council will disappear from the scene just as suddenly as it appeared in the not too distant future. Foreign Minister Wadephul rightly stated: ‘We already have a peace council, and that is the United Nations.’

This dictum is of central importance, and Europe and Germany should now act accordingly, actively supporting the United Nations and expanding their own role in the global organisation. This also presents opportunities for Germany in particular. Due to its growing role in financing, the development organisation UNDP recently announced that it would be relocating 300 jobs to Germany. While Trump markets his bizarre Peace Council, Bonn could become an even more important location for the UN. The United Nations is certainly not perfect but with its charter, universal membership and the International Court of Justice, it performs fundamental functions in the global community.

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Unlike the case of the peace council, which should simply be ignored, the situation is different when it comes to Gaza: here, Trump's institutions are legitimised by UN Resolution 2803. Nevertheless, Europe should first and foremost strengthen the role of the United Nations on the ground and defend it against the extreme attacks by the US and Israel. The various UN aid organisations have the experience, personnel and resources to provide rapid assistance – but are systematically prevented from doing their work. The physical destruction of the UNRWA headquarters in East Jerusalem by Israeli demolition excavators in January is a new and scandalous low point.

The EU must condemn such attacks and threaten harsh consequences. It must also clearly reject the recent restrictions on the work of dozens of international aid organisations and support the organisations affected. The *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation* has already demonstrated how disastrous the privatisation of aid in conflict is, with well over 1000 people killed at its distribution centres. The Civil-Military Coordination Centre, also dominated by the US and based in southern Israel, is creating new parallel structures for reconstruction and humanitarian aid instead of facilitating urgently needed access to the Gaza Strip.

The entire process lacks Palestinian participation and a path to self-determination. It is high time that the EU, as the most important supporter of the Palestinian Authority, not only rubber-stamps these plans, but takes the initiative itself: a path to the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza, but more importantly, a return to democratically legitimised Palestinian leadership is essential for this. This is because the Trump plan does not provide for an exit strategy from the new institutions that have now been laboriously created. Only a credible political perspective for the entire Palestinian territories can enable lasting stability.



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