

# Trump's Peace and the Palestinian Question: Individualism of 21st Century

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This paper analyzes the transformation of contemporary peace paradigms in relation to the Palestinian question through the conceptual lens of 21st century individualism, situating recent geopolitical developments within the broader evolution of American political thought. It argues that emerging initiatives—most notably the reconfiguration of the “Deal of the Century” framework into what may be described as the Kushner-Witkoff doctrine—reflect a deeper ideological shift rooted in Trumpist individualism. Rather than advancing a negotiated political settlement grounded in international law and collective rights, these initiatives reconceptualize the Palestinian cause as a technocratic, economic, and security file administered through internationalized managerial structures that exclude legitimate Palestinian representation. The study places this transformation within the intellectual trajectory of individualism from classical liberalism to contemporary populist nationalism. While classical liberal individualism emphasized universal rights, rule of law, limited government, and equality before legal institutions, Trumpist individualism selectively appropriates this language while subordinating its application to nationalist sovereignty, transactional governance, and identity-based politics. This hybrid configuration—combining rhetorical commitment to freedom with selective enforcement and institutional instrumentalization—reshapes both domestic American governance and foreign policy orientations, including approaches to protracted conflicts. Through a comparative analysis of classical liberal principles and policy practices under Trumpism, the paper demonstrates that contemporary peace proposals regarding Gaza and the West Bank reflect a politically mediated form of individualism: Rights are reframed as conditional privileges, sovereignty is recast as executive discretion, and international legal norms are treated as negotiable instruments rather than binding frameworks. In parallel, incremental structural changes in the West Bank—characterized by administrative integration, settlement expansion, and creeping annexation—further erode the territorial and institutional foundations of the two-state paradigm. The paper concludes that sustainable peace cannot emerge from managerial conflict containment or externally engineered governance models that bypass national self-determination. Instead, it requires coherence between liberal principles and their consistent application, reaffirmation of international legal baselines, and restoration of unified Palestinian political agency. Absent such alignment, both the liberal international order and the prospects for a just and durable resolution remain structurally fragile.

*Keywords:* individualism, Trumpism, Gaza, American individualism, populism, MAGA

## Introduction

The recent announcement by the so-called “Peace Council” of its first cohort of founding member states, published via its official X account (@BoardOfPeace), has reopened a profound political debate regarding the nature of emerging international approaches to the Palestinian question. The announced group includes states from diverse regions and political orientations, among them Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Turkey, Belarus, Paraguay, Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Cambodia, El Salvador, Hungary, Indonesia, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam. This composition reflects a striking geographic and political diversity, suggesting an ambition to construct a transregional international platform under the banner of “peace and cooperation”.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, when examined within its political context, this initiative raises fundamental questions about the substance of the peace being proposed, who defines it, and the legal and political foundations upon which it rests. Formal diversity in membership does not necessarily translate into diversity of reference frameworks or objectives—particularly when this announcement is read against the backdrop of broader shifts in U.S. policy toward the Palestinian question, and what I describe as the Kushner-Witkoff political doctrine. The heavy Arab and Islamic representation coupled with the absence of European main member states, moreover, raises serious questions about the Abraham Accords—now seemingly reintroduced in a *Trumpian* format.

This doctrine does not merely transcend the traditional notion of “economic peace”; rather, it represents a rebranded continuation of what stated during Trump’s first term, the so-called *Deal of the Century* (Iriqat, 2020). It advances a deliberate attempt to reengineer the Palestinian reality in its entirety, with Arab and Islamic participation, while bypassing national political legitimacy, popular Palestinian representation, and the reference frameworks of international law. Since Jared Kushner’s public statements—particularly during his participation in Middle East dialogues at Harvard University<sup>2</sup>—it has become clear that the issue is not about investment flows or improving living conditions, but about redefining the very essence of the Palestinian cause: transforming it from a national liberation struggle into a purely technocratic and investment-driven economic file.

Kushner is the ideologue; Witkoff is his current executive façade; and Trump remains the ultimate political reference. This trajectory becomes even more alarming with the White House announcement of the formation of an Executive Council for Gaza’s Peace, an international body tasked with overseeing the work of a newly established technocratic administrative committee in Gaza, in addition to supervising reconstruction and disarmament processes. According to the announcement, this council includes the United States, the United Nations, Israel, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Turkey, and Egypt, and is chaired by U.S. President Donald Trump. Leadership of the so-called “International Stabilization Force” has been assigned to U.S. General Jasper Jeffers, while Nikolay Meladenov has been appointed as the Council’s Senior Representative in Gaza, the high commissioner (Iriqat, 2026).

This structure clearly reveals the nature of the proposed approach: the management of Gaza as a security-economic file under direct international supervision, rather than as an inseparable part of the occupied Palestinian territory. General Jeffers is to oversee all security matters related to disarmament/decommissioning of Hamas,

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<sup>1</sup> Board of Peace X account, <https://x.com/BoardOfPeace>.

<sup>2</sup> Middle East Dialogues, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtaIHR5S0ts>.

aid delivery, and reconstruction, while Mladenov functions as a liaison between Gaza's administrative committee and the international executive council, which includes influential political and economic figures—most notably Steve Witkoff, Jared Kushner, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, American businessman Marc Rowan, former World Bank President Ajay Banga, alongside American political advisors.

The Gaza-specific executive council itself comprises a mix of U.S., regional, and international officials, business figures, and even Israeli representatives—in stark contrast to the complete absence of any Palestinian representation. Palestinians, the people of the land and bearers of the cause, are excluded from decision-making, only to be later expected to adapt to a manufactured “fait accompli”. Kushner has been explicit in his targeting of the Palestinian Authority, treating it not as a political partner but as a “functional obstacle” to be circumvented. This discourse cannot be understood as mere political criticism or a call for reform; rather, it is an integral part of a comprehensive doctrine aimed at marginalizing legitimate Palestinian leadership and opening space for engineered alternatives—whether in the form of local councils, technocratic committees, or newly branded frameworks marketed as “peace”, while politics itself is hollowed out of substance.

Paradoxically, the Palestinian leadership has welcomed<sup>3</sup> all of these formulas and councils, including UN Security Council Resolution 2803 (2025), upon which many of these imposed arrangements are based—despite the absence of a unified Palestinian national decision underpinning them.

In this context, Kushner's attacks on President Mahmoud Abbas and the so-called “old guard” cannot be separated from a systematic effort to delegitimize Palestinian leadership both morally and politically. Kushner selectively deployed a discourse of “elite corruption”, linking it to settlement expansion and what he framed as the “luxury” of Palestinian leadership, in attempt to justify bypassing official representation in favor of direct engagement with private sector actors or technocratic figures tied to the proposed investment schemes.

The danger lies not only in the rhetoric, but in its profound political consequences. The Palestinian cause is reduced to growth indicators, project numbers, and investment volumes, rather than evaluated through the lenses of rights, sovereignty, and self-determination. Palestinians are thus transformed from rights-holders under international law into conditional “beneficiaries”, whose access to limited privileges depends on their acceptance of externally imposed rules—administered outside any sovereign framework and traded for positions and material incentives that hollow out the cause itself.

Even more perilous is what may be described as “de facto separation with Palestinian acquiescence”. The concept of a “New Gaza” emerges at a moment of unprecedented Palestinian exhaustion, amid genocide, siege, starvation, and near-total collapse of life-sustaining structures. In such conditions, the risk of accepting any proposal framed as a humanitarian solution becomes acute—even if it comes at the expense of Palestinian geographic and political unity. From the perspective of governance and property rights, the proposal disregards both the human being and the law. There is no serious discussion of the rights of hundreds of thousands of landowners and homeowners whose properties have been destroyed, no protection of the civil registry, and no mechanisms to safeguard citizens' rights vis-à-vis foreign investors in the absence of genuine rule of law. Land is treated as an empty investment space, rather than as a legal and human domain with entrenched ownership and rights.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20251121-the-pas-endorsement-of-the-unsc-resolution/>.

The real fear is the administrative and political severing of Gaza from the West Bank under the guise of technocratic committees or transitional arrangements promoted as temporary and introduced with a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) backing. Yet Palestinian historical experience—and that of other peoples under occupation—demonstrates that “temporary solutions” often crystallize into permanent realities, imposed by force and normalized over time in service of the colonial Zionist project.

The danger, therefore, lies not only in Trump’s peace plan or in new frameworks such as the “Peace Council”, but in Palestinian acquiescence to any formula that fragments geography, dismantles unified political representation, and replaces rights with welfare promises devoid of legal or political guarantees—particularly under the pressures of war, destruction, and the catastrophe unleashed after October 7, which enabled external actors to shift the Palestinian cause from a legal-rights framework into a purely humanitarian one.<sup>4</sup>

### **Reassessing Peace Frameworks in Light of Structural Transformation in the West Bank**

Israeli cabinet measures in the West Bank reflect a continued strategy to remove the people and acquire the land translates into incremental annexation and the erosion of legal order. The recent policy decisions adopted by the Israeli cabinet should not be understood as isolated administrative adjustments. Taken together, they represent a structural shift in governance that consolidates Israeli authority in the West Bank through legal and institutional mechanisms. Rather than a formal declaration of annexation, what is unfolding is a calibrated process of incremental integration—often described in academic literature as creeping or de facto annexation.

This distinction is significant. Formal annexation invites immediate diplomatic confrontation. Incremental annexation, by contrast, advances through bureaucratic normalization: modification of applicable laws, consolidation of land registration systems, transfer of planning authority, and expanded settlement jurisdiction. These measures gradually transform territorial control into institutional permanence while maintaining ambiguity at the level of formal sovereignty. For peace-oriented actors, the core issue is not semantic. It is structural.

### **The Oslo Framework Under Strain**

The Oslo Accords were premised on the temporary division of authority pending a negotiated final status agreement. The integrity of Areas A, B, and C—and the distribution of civil and security competencies—formed the administrative backbone of that interim arrangement.

Recent expansions of settlement infrastructure and the reassignment of administrative authority in areas previously understood to be under Palestinian civil control raise serious questions regarding the continued viability of that framework. Even absent a formal repudiation of Oslo, the reallocation of authority on the ground effectively alters its operational assumptions.

Peace processes do not collapse only through declarations; they erode through cumulative departures from agreed parameters. The widening gap between the legal architecture of Oslo and current administrative practice creates uncertainty not only for Palestinians, but for international stakeholders who continue to reference the Accords as the baseline for diplomatic engagement.

### **Sovereignty, Symbolism, and Religious Sites**

Control over religious and heritage sites in Hebron and Jerusalem carries implications that extend beyond

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<sup>4</sup> A prosperous Gaza plan, The White House, <https://x.com/WhiteHouse/status/2024521440628789430/photo/3>.

local administration. In conflict settings, symbolic geography often precedes formal sovereignty. When governance arrangements at such sites are unilaterally altered, it signals an intention to redefine authority in spaces of high political and cultural significance.

From a peacebuilding perspective, unilateral restructuring of governance in contested sacred spaces increases volatility and undermines confidence in negotiated management mechanisms. Durable peace frameworks require shared arrangements, not exclusive consolidation.

### **The International Response: A Question of Consistency**

The international community has consistently affirmed its opposition to unilateral annexation and settlement expansion (UNSC RES. 2334) (2016). However, the policy instruments deployed to uphold this position have remained limited. The result is a widening gap between declaratory commitment to international law and the absence of material consequences for its erosion.

This dynamic risks normalizing incremental violations while preserving diplomatic language in support of a negotiated solution. The credibility of international legal norms depends not solely on articulation, but on consistent application. Peace councils and multilateral actors therefore face a strategic question: how to align policy tools with stated principles in a manner that preserves both engagement and accountability.

### **Regional Normalization and Strategic Leverage**

The normalization agreements between Israel and several Arab states introduced a new regional dynamic. These agreements were framed, in part, as stabilizing measures that could moderate escalation and halt annexation, the recent Israeli cabinet measures destroy that logic.

However, normalization without parallel conditionality related to developments in the occupied territories risks diminishing leverage. If regional integration proceeds independently of territorial developments, the incentive structure shifts. Diplomatic gains become decoupled from conflict resolution progress. For peace-oriented institutions, the challenge is not to oppose normalization per se, but to integrate it into a framework that reinforces—not replaces—accountability and negotiated settlement principles.

### **Legal Dimensions and International Obligations**

Under international humanitarian law, the transfer of civilian population into occupied territory and the permanent alteration of the legal character of such territory are prohibited. These norms are codified in the Fourth Geneva Convention and reflected in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Characterizing these developments purely as political disagreements risks obscuring their legal dimension. The issue at stake is not only diplomatic preference, but compliance with established international legal standards governing occupation. Constructive engagement requires acknowledging the legal framework while preserving channels for political resolution.

### **The Future of the Two-State Paradigm**

Perhaps the most consequential question is structural viability. The cumulative effect of settlement expansion, territorial fragmentation, and administrative integration challenges the geographic continuity necessary for a viable Palestinian state.

The two-state solution remains the declared objective of most international actors. Yet peace paradigms cannot survive indefinitely in rhetorical form if their territorial and institutional foundations erode. A credible peace framework requires congruence between political discourse and spatial reality. If current trends continue, the region may transition from an unresolved territorial conflict to a prolonged governance reality characterized by differential rights within a single territorial space—a scenario with profound moral, legal, and political implications.

### **Evolution of Individualism: From Classical Liberalism to Trumpism—Continuity or Rupture?**

Individualism has long been a contested concept, deeply embedded in Western political thought and liberal ideology. Its meaning has evolved across historical, philosophical, and socio-political contexts. The conceptual evolution of American individualism, with a particular focus on the Trumpism movement is emerging, asking whether Trumpist individualism represents continuity with or rupture from classical liberal traditions, grounded in classical liberalism and populism theories (Taormino, 2025; Taylor-Gooby & Leruth, 2018).

Trumpist individualism reflects a hybrid configuration. While it rhetorically reaffirms classical liberal principles such as individual rights, freedom of speech and religion, and market competition, it simultaneously departs from these traditions through selective enforcement, nationalist populism, and increased state intervention in economic and institutional spheres. These ruptures are driven largely by the “America First” doctrine (The White House, 2025a; 2025b), which prioritizes national sovereignty, identity politics, and transactional governance over universal liberal norms. By situating Trumpism within the longer intellectual history of individualism, this analysis contributes to contemporary debates on populism, liberal democracy, and the transformation of individualism in the 21st century.

Individualism has occupied a central place in political and philosophical debate, particularly within Western liberal traditions. Often associated with autonomy, self-determination, and individual rights, individualism has never been a fixed or singular concept. As Max Weber (2008) observed, the term encompasses a “heterogeneity of meanings”, shaped by historical and ideological contexts. From Enlightenment liberalism to contemporary populist movements, individualism has been repeatedly reinterpreted to reflect shifting political realities.

In the United States, individualism has historically been intertwined with classical liberal principles such as inalienable rights, the rule of law, limited government, and free markets. These values were institutionalized in foundational documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights (Walls, 2016; Waterhouse, n.d.). However, the rise of populist-nationalist movements—most notably Trumpism—raises critical questions about whether American individualism continues to align with this liberal tradition or whether it is undergoing a substantive transformation.

The question remains whether individualism under Trumpism represents continuity with or rupture from classical liberalism, and what this transformation implies for American political culture and governance.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

We draw on two primary theoretical traditions: classical liberalism and populism. Classical liberalism emphasizes individual rights, equality before the law, freedom of expression and religion, limited government, and a free-market economy. These principles provide the baseline against which Trumpist individualism is evaluated. Populism, by contrast, frames politics as a moral struggle between “the pure people” and “corrupt

elites.” Populist movements often reject institutional mediation, elevate charismatic leadership, and redefine individual rights through collective identity and national belonging. Trumpism embodies a populist-nationalist variant that reframes individualism through loyalty, nativism, and sovereignty. Together, these frameworks enable a systematic assessment of both continuity and rupture in Trumpist individualism (Baron Public Affairs, 2017).

The analysis compares Trump administration policies and practices—across both presidential terms—with classical liberal principles in three domains:

1. Individual rights and freedoms;
2. Rule of law;
3. Free-market economy and limited government.

Continuity is defined as alignment with classical liberal principles in rhetoric or practice, while rupture refers to deviations or selective application of these principles.

### **Historical Evolution of Individualism and the American Context**

Historically, individualism emerged through a long intellectual trajectory, from ancient Greek thought to Enlightenment liberalism. Thinkers such as John Locke, Immanuel Kant, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau emphasized autonomy, reason, natural rights, and legal equality. The Industrial Revolution later expanded individualism into the economic sphere through laissez-faire capitalism and market competition (Heywood, 2015).

In the American context, individualism became a defining cultural and political feature. The Declaration of Independence articulated a rights-based vision of the individual, while the Constitution institutionalized legal equality and limits on state power. Alexis de Tocqueville later described American individualism as a democratic tendency balancing self-reliance with civic engagement (Suehiro, 2009).

Over time, American individualism adapted to social and economic change—incorporating progressive reforms, welfare policies, neoliberal deregulation, and expressive cultural autonomy. These transformations illustrate that individualism has always been dynamic rather than static.

### **Trumpism and the Reframing of Individualism**

Trumpism is not a coherent ideology but a political configuration combining populism, nationalism, protectionism, and charismatic leadership. Rooted in the “America First” tradition, Trumpism positions national sovereignty and identity above global liberal norms. It presents itself as a corrective to globalization, elite governance, and multiculturalism, which are portrayed as threats to the American people.

Trumpist rhetoric emphasizes freedom, patriotism, and individual responsibility. Yet these concepts are reframed through collective identity, loyalty, and exclusion of perceived “others”, including immigrants, global institutions, and political opponents.

### **Individual Rights and Freedoms**

Trumpism rhetorically affirms freedom of speech and religion, invoking constitutional protections. Executive orders emphasized free expression and religious liberty. However, practice revealed selective enforcement. Restrictions on pro-Palestinian campus activism, visa revocations, press exclusion, and pressure on academic institutions suggest a narrowing of expressive freedom. Religious liberty policies disproportionately favoured conservative Christian groups, raising concerns about pluralism and equality (Lukes, 2025; 1971).

### **Rule of Law**

While the administration publicly upheld the rule of law, critics documented politicization of law enforcement, pressure on judicial institutions, targeting of political opponents, and challenges to institutional independence. These practices strained classical liberal commitments to impartiality and separation of powers (Stanford Legal, 2025).

### **Free Market and Limited Government.**

Trumpism combines deregulation and tax cuts with protectionism and state intervention. Tariff wars, industrial subsidies, equity stakes in private firms, and withdrawal from multilateral trade regimes signal a departure from classical liberal free-market orthodoxy. Economic individualism is thus subordinated to nationalist and security-driven priorities (The White House, 2025c; 2025d; 2025e).

The analysis demonstrates that Trumpist individualism is neither a full continuation nor a complete rupture from classical liberalism. It preserves liberal language and selectively adopts liberal principles, but reconfigures them within a populist-nationalist framework. Individual autonomy remains valued, yet it is increasingly conditioned by collective identity, loyalty, and national interest. Trumpist individualism is therefore best understood as politically mediated individualism—less universal, less rights-based, and more contingent on belonging within the national in-group.

A constructive path forward: For peace councils and policy platforms committed to stability and justice, the response must be multidimensional:

1. Reaffirm legal baselines: Anchor diplomatic engagement explicitly in international humanitarian law and prior agreements, clarifying the non-recognition of unilateral territorial changes.
2. Integrate accountability with engagement: Develop mechanisms that tie diplomatic, economic, or security cooperation to measurable compliance benchmarks, without severing dialogue.
3. Support institutional Palestinian cohesion: Encourage internal political coherence and democratic renewal within Palestinian institutions, including transparent electoral processes and unified representation.
4. Recalibrate regional leverage: Encourage regional actors to link normalization benefits to tangible de-escalatory steps on the ground.
5. Revitalize multilateral frameworks: Shift from ad hoc diplomatic responses to coordinated multilateral strategies capable of restoring credibility to peace commitments.

### **Conclusion**

This study has argued that Trumpism represents not a wholesale rejection of American liberalism, but its reconfiguration into a hybrid paradigm that fuses classical individualist rhetoric with populist nationalism. Foundational liberal principles—freedom, sovereignty, rights—remain discursively central, yet their application has become selective, contingent, and often subordinated to majoritarian or nationalist imperatives. The result is a recalibration of democratic norms that affects institutional integrity, global engagement, and the credibility of the liberal international order.

These transformations are not confined to domestic American politics. As populist-nationalist movements expand globally, they reshape the language of rights and sovereignty in ways that privilege political expediency over universal legal standards. The tension between rhetorical commitment to liberal values and their uneven implementation becomes particularly visible in contexts of prolonged conflict and occupation.

The situation unfolding in the West Bank exemplifies this broader dynamic. What is occurring is not merely a sequence of administrative decisions, but a structural reconfiguration of governance with profound implications for sovereignty, legality, and the viability of negotiated peace. Incremental territorial integration, legal modification, and institutional consolidation cumulatively alter the political landscape without the need for formal annexation. The critical issue is therefore not whether annexation is declared, but whether the international system is willing and able to respond to gradual transformations that reshape realities on the ground.

When liberal norms are invoked selectively—defended in principle yet inconsistently enforced—the gap between the language of international law and the practice of international politics widens. Peace frameworks grounded in legal commitments cannot endure indefinitely if territorial, demographic, and administrative facts systematically erode their foundations. Support for a negotiated solution must therefore be matched by coherence between legal principle, political will, and policy instruments.

Ultimately, sustainable peace cannot be constructed by circumventing the Palestinian people or by managing the conflict through unilateral structural adjustments. It requires recognition of inalienable rights, adherence to international legal standards, and the creation of political conditions that enable genuine self-determination exercised freely and with dignity. Without such alignment, both the liberal international order and the prospects for a just and lasting peace will remain structurally fragile.

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