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AMOS GILEAD addresses the Institute for Policy and Strategy. (IPS)

Amos Gilead to Trump: 'Don't present your plan'

DIPLOMATIC AFFAIRS

• By **HERB KEINON**

With Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu set to travel to Washington Sunday, Amos Gilead – a former senior IDF and defense ministry official – has a word of advice to the Americans: Don't roll out the peace plan, please.

At least not unless they are at least 75% sure that the Arab world will not reject it. And the chances of the Arab states accepting a plan that will be turned down by the Palestinians – which they have already said they will do – is almost nil, Gilead said in an interview with *The Jerusalem Post*.

"I don't know what is in Trump's plan, but I am concerned because it does not look to me like it will be accepted either by the Palestinians or the Arabs," Gilead said of the long-awaited blueprint for peace that the Administration has been working on for some two years, and which Netanyahu is surely to discuss with US President Donald Trump when they meet in the White House early next week.

And if the Palestinians and Arab states reject a plan put forth by the United States, the most powerful and influential nation in the world, then that means "There is no hope, no political horizon, and that will only lead to frustration," Gilead said. Putting forth a plan that would likely be rejected would be very destabilizing, he warned, because it would show clearly that there is no peace option.

Gilead today is the head of IDC Herzliya's Institute for Policy and Strategy and chairman of the Herzliya Conference. Prior to that, he served for some 40 years in senior Defense Ministry and IDF positions. As director of the Defense Ministry's powerful Policy and Political-Military Affairs bureau from 2003 to 2017,

he was a key figure in managing relations with Egypt and Jordan. His roles in the IDF included head of the Military Intelligence Research Division; IDF Spokesperson; Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories; and Military Secretary to prime minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Gilead, who admitted that he does not know what is in the Trump plan outside of hints that are being leaked, said he cannot imagine that it will be accepted by the Palestinians, and that if they are not on board, then the Arab world will not adopt it, because to do so would be to shake their own internal stability.

"They will look at the plan and say Inshallah (God willing), it is impressive, we will discuss it – that is their method – but they don't want internal turmoil."

Gilead said that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's "strength is in his weakness. He can't compete against Israel, but he can say to the Arab states, 'Don't you dare recognize the Trump plan'."

And they won't, he said, because to do so would be seen as a form of treason to the Arab cause.

"My impression from the Arabs is that they will not do anything that is considered a betrayal of the Palestinians, not because they love them, but because they love themselves."

Gilead said that if the Arab states, as part of the plan, publicly open diplomatic or economic ties with Israel, that will be viewed as a betrayal of a deep seated Arab issue.

The Arabs have no problems deepening their ties with us underground, but not in having normal ties," he said. "The Arab states have discovered Israel's value, and I am happy about that – personally I have spent many hours on these things, and they are impressive – but they are under the ground."

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Gilead dismissed as an "illusion" thinking that the Arab world would make peace or normalize ties with Israel without an agreement with the Palestinians. And he was unimpressed by the small signs of normalization that have taken place over the last few months, such as the Special Olympics in which an Israeli team participated in this week in Abu Dhabi, or Saudi permission for Air India to fly over its airspace on flights to and from Israel.

"That is nothing," he said of these and similar moves. "It doesn't impress me. I'm not looking for gestures, but for real things. I want our chief-of-staff or head of the air force or navy to go to Egypt in the middle of the day and be received by an honor guard. After 40 years [of peace], why hasn't that happened?"

The reason, he said, is simple: "They are afraid of normalization. The public is not in favor of it, and they are worried that if they do it, it will shake their stability."

Gilead said that the security and intelligence cooperation between Israel and the Sunni Arab states is both strong and welcome. "But it is not enough, because it is not stable and could change." He likened this to a tree with only one root that could easily be swept away in a political hurricane. And such hurricanes are not unheard of in the Middle East.

Gilead pointed to Iran, with which Israel once had close ties, as an example of how drastically things can change. He also pointed to Turkey, whose President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is implacably hostile toward Israel, but a country with whom Israel had very strong ties before he came to power in 2002. God forbid, he said, that the Muslim Brotherhood would gain control of Egypt.

The peace agreement with Egypt would not survive the Muslim Brotherhood in power there, he said. He called Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi "a miracle," and said his ousting of Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi as president of Egypt in 2013 – after a year in power – was an event of historic proportions.

"He didn't do it for us," Gilead said of Sisi's overthrow of Morsi. "He said, 'I saved Egypt,' he didn't say, 'I saved Israel.' He didn't do this for us. He did it for the good of Egypt. But that he took that step is in my eyes a Biblical event. It is amazing."

Gilead noted that Sisi is a religious man, whom Morsi appointed as defense minister. "He then sent him to jail, and stood firm in the face of very strong American pressure from [president Barack] Obama to release him. He did not agree."

Gilead said that Sisi "saved the stability in the Middle East," and put an end to an emerging Muslim Brotherhood alliance between Egypt and Turkey that would have dramatically altered the region. "Since then," Gilead said, "Turkey was greatly weakened as a threatening force in the region."

Regarding the Palestinians, Gilead said that Israel was "making big mistakes" in its policies toward the Palestinians, especially toward Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, whom he said Israel will "miss" when he is gone.

As opposed to Yasser Arafat, whom Gilead termed a mega-murderer and arch-terrorist – and someone he said he recommended against negotiating peace with – Abbas is different.

"Today Abbas is against terrorism, and we present him as a terrorist," he said. "He is not a terrorist. No one in the security establishment will say he is a terrorist."

But he supports terrorism, Gilead is reminded, especially through payments to terrorists and their families.

"That is how he maintains his legitimacy," he responds, "and it has been like this from many years. It is not new."

Gilead said the government made a mistake last month when it decided to deduct from the money it transfers to the Palestinians the money the PA pays out to terrorists and their families. He said the US is also making a mistake in cutting financial assistance to the PA.

Israel, Gilead said, needs to decide whether it wants Abbas and the Palestinian Authority to continue, or whether it wants to set up a new military administration and reassert its complete control of the West Bank.

"It is politically legitimate to say, 'I want to occupy the territories, or annex them,' he said. "OK, then set up a military administration, something that costs billions."

Gilead obviously does not want Israel to travel that path, and as a result believes it needs to prevent the collapse of the PA, not because he thinks a negotiated peace is just around the corner, but because the current security situation in Israel is good, and Jerusalem has an interest in keeping it that way.

Israel needs to prevent the collapse of the Palestinian Authority, but instead is hitting its economic lifelines, he complained. "Soon they will not have salaries to pay police who are working for – not for us – but for public security." He noted that Tanzim, Fatah's para-military faction, "is a wild and violent group that is quiet."

"Overall, tourism is blossoming because there is security, and this is worth billions. We are destroying UNRWA – which is despicable organization – but not bringing an alternative, and in the end counting on it to distribute money in Gaza."

Gilead said that regardless of the moral problem in transferring money to the PA that is then used to pay terrorists, Israel's objective needs to be to save lives. "If you don't have a better plan, and we don't have a plan, then at least save lives. That Israel is a relatively quiet country, that Jerusalem is quiet, who would believe that? It is a phenomenal achievement." He gives the IDF, Military Intelligence, the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency), and the police the majority of the credit, but said that the PA has also played a role in the quiet.

"As long as the PA is acting against terrorism, we should not take action against its sources of money, because without money, it is like a car without gas," he said.

Gilead warned that if the PA collapses and the West Bank explodes as a result, it could have a spillover effect in Jordan, which is facing severe economic problems and has taken in 1.5 million refugees from Syria.

"Every day we should, and I did this when I was in the security establishment, wake up and ask, 'How is Jordan doing today?' Jordan is stable," he said, adding, "We need to be concerned that it does not deteriorate." •