Trump’s first year back in office expanded Israel’s freedom of action

written by Prof. Zaki Shalom | 21.01.2026

Much attention is currently being devoted to assessing the first year of President Donald Trump’s term in office.

There is no doubt that this year has been marked by an exceptionally intense level of diplomatic, military, legal, law-enforcement, and economic activity on the part of this administration, both in the realms of domestic and foreign policy.

From the Israeli perspective, President Trump’s entry into the White House represented an unprecedentedly positive turning point. Trump granted Israel full legitimacy to operate across all seven theaters of conflict that have opened against it since the October 7 Massacre in 2023. He also provided Israel with the necessary tools to do so. On several occasions, he made it clear that if Hamas failed to comply with his demands, it would face what he termed the “gates of hell.”

Surprisingly, Israel made only partial use of this “authorization”. As a result, Hamas continues to exercise firm control over the Gaza Strip. True, its capabilities have been significantly degraded. It can no longer disrupt daily life in Israel through massive rocket fire. Nevertheless, it is still regarded as a legitimate interlocutor in any political arrangement. Hamas continues to enjoy substantial support from several influential Middle Eastern states, including Turkey, Qatar, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.

Hamas still expresses unequivocal opposition to the Israeli-American demand that it disarm. It remains unclear whether it will voluntarily relinquish its weapons or whether it will choose instead to enter into a comprehensive military confrontation with Israel.

In any case, President Trump’s aspiration and vision to undertake a historic move – namely, the evacuation of Gaza’s residents and their resettlement in other countries – has faded beyond the horizon. Why did this initiative fail – at least at

this stage – despite its potential to secure Israel's southern border for many years? Was it due to criticism from left-wing circles in Israel, from legal experts, and from military figures who opposed the plan with varying degrees of intensity? Who knows?

Israeli-American strike on Iran's nuclear facilities

President Trump's most significant contribution over the past year was the joint Israeli-American strike on strategic sites in Iran, foremost among them Iran's nuclear facilities, which posed an existential threat to Israel.

However, beyond these strategic events, President Trump bestowed upon Israel a number of "covert gifts" that have yet to receive the attention they deserve. His demand for control over Greenland appears, at first glance, to be far removed from the spectrum of Israel's national interests. In practice, however, it is of immense importance to Israel.

Since the end of the Six-Day War, the international community has consistently upheld the principle that the territories captured during the war constitute a kind of deposit that Israel would be required to return to their owners once "peace comes to the land."

United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 gave explicit expression to this notion by emphasizing "the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war." In its wake, almost every US president initiated peace plans based on Israeli withdrawal from the territories. The Israeli government itself adopted this conception, at least partially, in its cabinet decision of 19 June 1967, which expressed Israel's willingness to withdraw to the international borders with Egypt and Syria in exchange for peace agreements.

President Trump's demand to obtain sovereignty over, or at least military control of, Greenland–initially met with ridicule and derision – now appears far more tangible. Senior officials of the Danish government have recently been engaged in intensive negotiations with representatives of the Trump administration on this issue. The Trump administration justifies this demand on security grounds.

This point is of great importance to Israel. The range of risks facing Israel is far

greater than that confronting the United States. In short, Israel now has a “strong rope” to cling to should it seek to realize claims of sovereignty over Judea and Samaria, as well as over territories seized during the current war in the Gaza Strip, Syria, Lebanon, and Somaliland.

US military activity vis-à-vis Venezuela, particularly the abduction of President Nicolás Maduro, constitutes a clear expression of the “America First” principle that President Trump emphasized from the earliest days of his presidency. In practice, one of the most far-reaching implications of this trend is the prioritization of US security needs over the principles of international law.

From Israel’s perspective, this development significantly expands its military freedom of maneuver in wartime situations–freedom that has been constrained, to varying degrees, by legal considerations.

Finally, the establishment of the “Board of Peace,” intended to address the regulation of crisis in the Gaza Strip (and, subsequently, in other conflict zones worldwide), may free Israel from the constraints imposed on it by the United Nations, thereby further expanding its strategic room for maneuver.

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