



Robert Weiner



Ingrid Lang

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Trump's Dictator-Autocracy Diplomacy: Is Cost of His Middle East Deal a New World Order for U.S. with no Free World?

By [Robert Weiner](#) and [Ingrid Lang](#)

In analyzing Donald Trump's dictator-autocracy diplomacy in achieving live hostage returns in Gaza, one must ask, is *the cost of his Middle East deals a new world order for the U.S.?*

Trump likes to call himself a dealmaker. But when it comes to the latest Gaza cease-fire framework, what's being celebrated as diplomatic brilliance is really a master class in working with his autocratic dictator friends.

Trump leaned on personal ties with authoritarian rulers, men like Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia (whom U.S. intelligence directly linked to the brutal 2018 killing of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul) and Mohammed bin Zayed of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), whose priorities have little to do with democracy or human rights. What united them was a web of transactional interests such as oil, arms, investments, and image.

[More than 30 countries](#) attended or backed the summit and cease-fire framework, including Egypt, Qatar, Jordan, Pakistan, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and China. Many of these governments especially in the Gulf and Asia have long records of restricting press freedom, repressing opposition, and curtailing women's rights. Yet under Trump's diplomacy, they sit not as reform partners but as dealmakers. The list of participants is disproportionately made up of autocracies, not democracies.

The agreement remains fragile, with many details still [to be determined](#), including the future disarmament of Hamas and the governance of Gaza once the guns fall silent. This is not diplomacy built on values. It is diplomacy built on power and personal gain. [The Global Observatory](#) recently described this style as the business-based approach to peace mediation, warning that mediation once the preserve of diplomats and statesmen has become an arena for entrepreneurs in search of both influence and profit. The description could have been written with Trump in mind.

On the other hand, Trump's [recent agreement](#) with Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi on rare earth and critical mineral supplies shows a different side of his strategy. While he leaned on personal ties with autocrats in the Middle East, he can just as easily embrace a democratic ally when it serves his interests. This is not a change in values, but it does show Trump's talent for reading the room sometimes, and doing whatever deal benefits him most.

What does the Gaza living-hostages deal mean for the so-called Free World? When peace becomes a product, democracy becomes collateral damage. Trump's Middle East friendships are founded on convenience as they shield autocrats from scrutiny while offering him headlines and donor networks. As [Le Monde](#) observed earlier this year, Trump and the Gulf monarchs see eye to eye, united by mutual economic gain rather than democratic norms.

The moral trade-offs overwhelm democratic objectives. For a temporary truce and the very important release of the twenty remaining living hostages, Washington made no statement even in general terms criticizing regimes that still deny women the right to full education, jail dissenters, and suppress free expression. [BBC News](#) [noted](#) that these same governments are already touting the cease-fire as proof of their regional leadership, even as they continue their crackdowns at home.

If this were a permanent, verifiable peace, the calculus might change. However, the ceasefire's success depends on long-term commitments, disarmament, reconstruction, and credible monitoring. What makes Trump's approach uniquely dangerous is that it normalizes the idea that peace can be bought, not built.

Past administrations, Republican and Democrat alike, operated within some democratic guardrails. They had to consult Congress, respect international institutions, or at least appear consistent with U.S. values. Trump's method throws all that aside. He cuts deals directly with those who flatter him, measures success in loyalty rather than substance, and calls it history.

[The Global Observatory](#) article warns that such dealmaking diplomacy risks producing frameworks of convenience rather than durable resolutions. These agreements may pause conflict but rarely transform its causes. And when they collapse, the damage to trust and to America's credibility is lasting.

Every hostage returned is a victory. But peace should be more than the art of the deal. With no statement of our highest values, if the price is the empowerment of autocrats and the erosion of democratic accountability, then the free world must ask whether something big was missed in the language.

Trump's opportunism -- the same quality that fuels his business brand -- also defines his diplomacy. His willingness to trade moral clarity for personal relationships with autocrats may yield short-term deals, but it corrodes the foundation of democratic leadership. By aligning the United States with regimes that jail dissidents, silence women, and suppress basic freedoms, Trump's version of peace risks legitimizing the very forces democracy is meant to restrain.

If this is the future of U.S. diplomacy, it could leave the free world weaker.

Robert Weiner is a former White House spokesman in both the Clinton & Bush administrations, former Public Affairs Director under Drug Czar/4-Star General McCaffrey, spokesman for the House Narcotics Committee under Chairman Charles Rangel, Chief of Staff of the House Aging Committee under Claude Pepper,

legislative assistant Cong Ed Koch, spokesman for the House Government Operations and Oversight Committee under John Conyers;. and a political aide to Ted Kennedy. Since leaving the White House, he created and currently directs an op-ed group recruiting young journalists as co-writers. He we won the National Press Club President's Award for the program: www.weinerpublic.com/opeds

Ingrid Lang *is Policy Analyst at Robert Weiner Associates and the Solutions for Change Foundation and a Norwegian journalist.*

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Robert Weiner: [Click Here](#)

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