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The Trump Plan: What's Next?

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The timing of President Donald Trump's invitation to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and to Chairman of the Blue and White alliance and Knesset opposition leader Benny Gantz to meet with him in Washington as part of the launch of the "deal of the century" was driven by the current political circumstances in both Israel and the United States. Beyond the political considerations, however, at issue is a key item on Israel's national security agenda: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For this reason, it is important to analyze the plan's potential significance, assess its implications for the political process, and weigh its prospects for advancing a resolution to the conflict. Despite the Palestinian refusal to discuss the plan, Israel would be wise to adopt the plan in principle as a basis for resolving the conflict in the future. However, this will not suffice. When it becomes clear that the plan does not promote an agreement with the Palestinians, and assuming that the coming Knesset elections lead to the establishment of a government in Jerusalem, the question "where do we go from here?" looms large. This article contends that many components of the Trump plan match the strategic rationale that informs the INSS Plan, *A Strategic Framework for the Israeli-Palestinian Arena*. Israel should promote a policy based on the principles of the INSS Plan, which stresses coordination with the United States, efforts to enlist Arab support, and an endeavor to preserve the option for a future agreement in the spirit of a two-state solution. Unlike unilateral annexation by Israel, which is fraught with dangers, this recommended policy can generate a positive political horizon with good chances of gaining international support from the Trump administration and beyond.

The timing of President Donald Trump's invitation to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and to Chairman of the Blue and White alliance and Knesset opposition leader Benny Gantz to meet with him in Washington as part of the launch of the "deal of the century" was driven by the current political circumstances in both Israel and the United States. Beyond the political considerations, however, at issue is a key item on Israel's national security agenda: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For this reason, it is important to analyze the plan's potential significance, assess its implications for the political process and its prospects for advancing a resolution to the conflict, and consider the following steps, once the details of the "deal of the century" are made public.

Yet even in advance of its official announcement, and with all due caution, there is reason to assume that **the main parameters of the Trump plan for an Israeli-Palestinian arrangement are as follows:**

- A guarantee of the all components critical to *Israel's security*: Israeli control of the Jordan Valley, leaving strategic sites in Israeli hands; continued Israeli control of the aerial and electromagnetic spheres; the demilitarization of any future Palestinian state; and freedom of operation that allows the IDF to fight terrorism in the entire area west of the Jordan River. In this context, Israel would have security control of the entire area surrounding a Palestinian state and all border crossings.
- *Establishment of a Palestinian state after four years*, subject to the fulfilment of several preconditions: recognition of Israel as a Jewish state whose capital is Jerusalem and the dismantlement of all Hamas military infrastructures and capabilities.
- *Jerusalem would remain under Israeli control* at the security fence line, and this would exclude several Arab neighborhoods from the city's municipal area. Jerusalem would have a symbolic Palestinian presence, including access to the holy sites and a Palestinian capital in the city's eastern section. The status of Jordan as custodian of the holy sites would remain unchanged.
- *The plan does not recognize a Palestinian "right of return"* to Israeli territory, but it may include a symbolic, limited, and controlled return of refugees to areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority. The vast majority of refugees would be rehabilitated where they currently reside.
- *Jewish settlements in the West Bank would not be evacuated*; it is not clear if this applies to the settlements' areas of jurisdiction or the constructed areas. Illegal outposts would be evacuated, affecting about 10,000 people, most of whom are considered extremists within the settler movement.
- *Borders:*
 - Some 40 percent of Area C would be transferred to Israel.
 - The Palestinians would receive territorial compensation or "swaps" of significant scope, though not at a one-to-one ratio, in the western Negev.
 - There would be two Israeli corridors from the Green Line to the Jordan Valley: along Route 5 and Route 1.
 - The Gaza Strip and West Bank would be joined by a tunnel to ease passage from one area to the other.
- To support the construction of an independent, functional Palestinian entity, *extensive development of the economy and infrastructures would be undertaken in the PA territory through the investment of tens of billions of dollars*, based on the principles presented at the economic conference in Bahrain in June 2019. Among the objectives of this very ambitious program would be doubling the Palestinian

- GDP, creating one million jobs, reducing unemployment to a one-digit percentage rate within a decade, and more.
- *Resources would be invested in PA governance*, involving infrastructure, healthcare, justice, education, employment, and other projects.
 - *An international investment fund* of \$50 billion would be established. Of this sum, \$28 billion would be allocated for investment in PA territory and the rest in neighboring countries to enlist their support for the plan: \$7.5 billion in Jordan, \$9 billion in Egypt, and \$6.5 billion in Lebanon.

Eight key insights emerge from these central parameters:

- a. *This is the most favorable plan for Israel ever presented by an international player.* In terms of the core issues of the conflict – borders, security, the status of Jerusalem, and the Palestinian refugee problem – the plan is based on outlines and principles much more comfortable for Israel than those formulated by the Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama administrations.
- b. The plan acknowledges the reality on the ground and the changes in the theater, *in particular in the West Bank since the 1990s, and makes it clear to the Palestinians that time is no longer working in their favor.*
- c. However, it is clear that *the plan will not lead to peace and cannot even serve as a foundation for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in the near future.*
- d. There is currently no agreement between Israel and the Palestinians about the conditions for resuming direct negotiations, and therefore *at present the conditions for successful direct negotiations on a permanent two-state solution do not exist.* Neither leadership – Israeli or Palestinian – enjoys public support. This is especially true of the Palestinian side, where PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, in the 15th year of a four year term, is nearing the end of a long political career, and the Palestinian system is split between the West Bank, controlled by the PA, and the Gaza Strip, controlled by Hamas.
- e. *The plan presumes Arab support* – both political and economic – even if the US effort is rejected by the Palestinians. However, it is highly doubtful that under current circumstances, Riyadh, Cairo, and Amman will support it.
- f. *It is not clear if the plan is a package deal, valid only if all its components are accepted,* or if it can be applied incrementally or unilaterally regarding the components that are positive for Israel. It is not clear whether from the perspective of the US administration, a Palestinian rejection of the plan would automatically make it possible for Israel to determine facts on the ground and take unilateral action right away.
- g. The plan could also be a starting point for future progress on a two-state solution, which would provide a response to Israel's three major concerns: ensuring its

- future as a state that is Jewish, democratic, and secure, and doing so within parameters acceptable to most Israelis.
- h. *Bringing the Palestinian issue back to the forefront of the international stage is not in Israel's interest at the present moment.* Israel's concerns should continue to focus on the central urgent security threats, all of which are emanate from Iran: Iran's nuclear program, Iran's entrenchment in Syria, and the precision missile project in Lebanon. The Israeli government must not allow the United States in particular, or the international community in general, to push these issues to the sidelines in favor of the Palestinian issue: the former are critical matters of the utmost urgency to Israel's national security.

Despite the Palestinian refusal to discuss the Trump plan, the silence in the Arab world, and the expected denunciations from European capitals, Israel would be wise to adopt the plan in principle as the basis for a future resolution to the conflict. However, this will not suffice. When it becomes clear that the plan does not promote an agreement with the Palestinians, assuming that the coming Knesset elections lead to the establishment of a government in Jerusalem, the question of **“where do we go from here” looms large.**

The current Israeli policy, incorrectly called “maintaining the status quo,” is highly problematic, because it is gradually leading to a one-state reality between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. This could eventually force the country to choose between the Jewish and democratic components of its identity. Israel's radical right can be expected to use the Palestinian refusal to even discuss the Trump plan to try to effect the annexation of the Jordan Valley and Area C – a rash, dangerous move, rife with negative ramifications. Such a move would endanger the peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, which are strategic national security assets; escalate tensions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip; drag Israel into a political confrontation with the international community and the Democratic Party in the United States; and spur anti-Israeli actions in the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague – all while diverting the attention of the international community from where it rightfully is today, focused on Iran.

The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) has drafted a proposal, based on an inviolable commitment to the idea of Israel as a state that is necessarily both Jewish and democratic. As formulated in [*A Strategic Framework for the Israeli-Palestinian Arena* \(October 2018\)](#), Israel can and must use the expected Palestinian rejection of the Trump plan to shape a new reality to benefit itself. The preferred route for advancing toward an arrangement, as spelled out in the INSS Plan, is direct negotiations and an agreement with the Palestinians. However, Israel's initiative must not be stopped by the Palestinian refusal to return to the negotiating table and an inability to reach a solution based on the two-state idea under conditions and parameters acceptable to Israel. Therefore, it is

necessary to identify the right way to advance at every given time and in every situation relative to Israel's national objectives, even if this means navigating through alternate routes. The *Framework* proposes Israel's independent separation from the West Bank, which would be coordinated with the United States and the relevant Arab nations; it would evolve in a way that would preserve the option of subsequently creating a two-state reality, given the right conditions. In tandem, Israel would try to enlist the Palestinians to support other Israeli moves and coordinate with them to the degree possible, while at the same time deny them the ability to veto moves affecting Israel's future, i.e., creating the geographic, demographic, and security conditions that would preserve Israel as a Jewish, democratic, secure, and morally just state

In conclusion, to a great extent, many components of the Trump plan match the strategic rationale that informs the INSS Plan. A balanced, proper move would be to promote a policy based on the principles of the *Framework*, in coordination with the United States and with Arab support, while retaining the option for a future agreement in the spirit of a two-state solution. Unlike unilateral annexation, which is fraught with dangers, this policy can generate a positive political horizon with good chances of gaining international support, even beyond the Trump administration.