

A Palestinian Perspective on President Trump's Peace Plan

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This article highlights the need for the Palestinian leadership to make a counterproposal or present the reasons why it objects to President Trump's peace vision, which was unveiled in January 2020. Even the most vehement Palestinian rejection of the plan may not stop the implementation of certain aspects of the vision – such as the possible annexation of the Jordan Valley, all Israeli settlements, and other parts of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Therefore, it is in the best interests of the Palestinians, represented by the Palestinian Authority, to come forth with a proposal of their own regarding an acceptable peace agreement with Israel. Indeed, Palestinians can no longer afford to continue waging a “holy” war against President Trump. In fact, President Trump can be an invaluable ally for the Palestinians if he is approached differently and treated properly.

The purpose of this article is to highlight the need for the Palestinian leadership to make a counterproposal or present the reasons why it objects to Trump's peace vision that was unveiled in January 2020. Even the most vehement Palestinian rejection of the plan may not stop the implementation of certain aspects of the vision – such as the possible annexation of the Jordan Valley, all Israeli settlements, and other parts of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. These developments, should they occur, will have long term and foreseeably irreversible adverse effects on the future prospects of a sovereign and viable Palestinian state.

Based on that line of logic, it is in the best interests of the Palestinians, represented by the Palestinian Authority, to come forth with a vision/ideas/proposals/demands of their own of what an acceptable peace agreement with Israel might look like. This was also the essence of my article, [co-authored with President Trump's former Special Envoy to the Middle East Jason Greenblatt](#), published one day before the plan's release this past January.

Realistically, neither Israel nor Palestine will end up getting what it wants. Being the occupier, Israel will get as much of the spoils as the world, especially the United States, allows it.

It is imperative that the Palestinians put forth their own vision for a peace deal now for the following reasons:

- It is likely, in my view, that the authors of the Trump peace plan anticipated that there would be revisions, even major and significant changes, to the proposed Trump plan to accommodate Palestinian demands and aspirations.
- I am of the opinion that President Trump meant what he said during the unveiling of the plan at the White House when he said: "It is only reasonable that I have to do a lot for the Palestinians, or it wouldn't be fair."
- Given the current political landscape in the United States, it is irrelevant whether President Trump's chances for re-election have diminished because of his administration's handling of the corona pandemic. Trump will be President through the beginning of January 2021. During that time, much can happen under Trump's watch that will affect the future of the Israel-Palestine conflict for decades to come. Besides, Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic candidate, has already stated that he would not reverse Trump's decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem. Furthermore, he is neither charismatic, young, nor an orator, and could be ravished by Trump's ferocious attacks during the US presidential debates.
- President Trump recently extended an olive branch to the Palestinians in the form of a \$5-million grant to help fight the coronavirus. This was the first amount of aid, outside of the security aid offered to Palestinian security forces via the CIA. This amount, albeit symbolic, is significant politically. It is the first form of aid presented to the Palestinians in over two years after all aid was cut off to the Palestinians including the PA, UNRWA, and private Palestinian hospitals.
- It is unfortunate that the Palestinian negotiators who have failed time and time again are still in positions of power. They always blame their failures on others and never themselves. If Abbas wants a peace deal, he needs new thinking heads around him, people who are visionaries and pragmatists. Those people should be able to foresee the benefits of the Trump peace plan, with all its shortcomings, and take advantage of President Trump's eagerness to make history.
- Politically, Palestinians are weak and divided (Hamas fully controls the Gaza Strip) but Abbas's leadership is still widely viewed as representative of the Palestinian people worldwide.
- Abbas is old and not in good health, and the vultures of Fatah are getting ready to swoop down to try and grab the leadership. If Abbas, who is uniquely positioned to make a deal with Israel, misses the chance to make a peace deal now, no one on the Palestinian side will have the legitimacy or the power to sit down and negotiate a peace deal with either Israel or the United States until a new powerful and legitimate leader emerges. By that time, Israel might have annexed the Jordan

- Valley (30 percent of the West Bank) and the settlement blocs (another 11 percent of the West Bank).
- Time, therefore, is of the essence. Israel and the US are currently “mapping” the areas of the West Bank that Israel wishes to annex. Once the “mapping” is completed, Israel could, but not likely, get the green light from the US to proceed with annexing “parts” of the Jordan Valley, including large settlement blocs.
 - This annexation can be delayed, if not completely stopped, if and when the Palestinians indicate that they wish to sit at the table and engage in negotiations over the terms of the peace plan or make a counterproposal.

Over the past several weeks, strange twists of events transpired in Israeli politics. Benny Gantz turned his back on his allies and decided to form an “emergency” government with Benjamin Netanyahu, presumably in order to focus on fighting the coronavirus. Conveniently, the coalition agreement permits Netanyahu to introduce an annexation proposal to the government after July 1, even if Gantz objects.

To what extent Gantz's presence in the government will help or hinder the peace process has yet to be seen. However, as a military man, and like hundreds of top former Israeli security personnel, he is not convinced that annexing large areas of the West Bank will serve Israel's long-term security interests. These security people want a two-state solution and do not want an eventual bi-national state where Jews are not the majority.

Furthermore, no Israeli government can afford to rupture its ties with the Jordanian government. Israel's annexation of the Jordan Valley is a red line that Amman cannot and will not tolerate in its relationship with Israel. There have been a mere handful of incidents on the border between Jordan and the West Bank since they signed their peace agreement some 25 years ago. Annexing the Jordan Valley will agitate the largely Palestinian population in Jordan, and Jordan's King cannot afford any more disturbances engendered by Israel's aggressive behavior.

Trump and his advisors were likely aware that the Trump peace plan offered Israel everything it might have asked for and more, as one former Israeli general told me during a recent meeting in Tel Aviv. However, given what we know about the Trumpian manner of diplomacy, the President, in my view, is prepared to lean on Israel to accept many of the Palestinians' basic national and historic demands. Therefore, the Palestinians ought to set aside their emotions and engage with Trump. Trump can become Palestine's most important proponent of an equitable two-state solution, now that he has won over the Israelis and satisfied his domestic base of right-wing evangelical voters.

Palestinians can no longer afford to continue waging a “holy” war against President Trump. Just the opposite, President Trump can be an invaluable ally for the Palestinians if he is approached differently and treated properly.

President Trump needs the Palestinians. The President needs a “spectacular win” on the international arena that could potentially earn him a Nobel Peace Prize. The Palestinians should grab this opportunity and lean on Trump to secure the most favorable terms while negotiating a peace deal with the Israelis. As ironic as it might sound, President Trump could ultimately be the deliverer to the Palestinians of the best possible terms of a Palestinian state!

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