**Farcical USA peace plan to resolve Palestine-Israel conflict**

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The [Israeli-Palestinian](https://dailytimes.com.pk/549200/jared-kushner-says-hes-read-25-books-on-the-israeli-palestinian/) conflict is the ongoing struggle between Israelis and Palestinians that began in the mid-20th century. Various attempts have been made to resolve the conflict as part of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process with only partial success, as at the end of 2019. The origins to the conflict can be traced back to Jewish immigration and sectarian conflict in Mandatory Palestine between Jews and Arabs. It has been referred to as the world’s “most intractable conflict”, with the ongoing Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip reaching 53 years. Despite a long-term peace process and the general reconciliation of Israel with Egypt and Jordan, Israelis and Palestinians have so far failed to reach a final peace agreement. The key issues are: mutual recognition, borders, security, water rights, control of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements, Palestinian freedom of movement, and Palestinian right of return. The violence of the conflict, in a region rich in sites of historic, cultural and religious interest worldwide for three main religions, has been the object of numerous international conferences dealing with historic rights, security issues and human rights, and has been a factor hampering tourism in and general access to areas that are hotly contested.

Many attempts have been made to broker a two-state solution, involving the creation of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel (after Israel’s establishment in 1948). In 2007, the majority of both Israelis and Palestinians, according to a number of polls, preferred the two-state solution over any other solution as a means of resolving the conflict. Moreover, a majority of Jews see the Palestinians’ demand for an independent state as just, and thinks Israel can agree to the establishment of such a state. According to unreliable sources, the majority of Palestinians and Israelis in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have expressed a preference for a two-state solution. Mutual distrust and significant disagreements are deep over basic issues, as is the reciprocal skepticism about the other side’s commitment to upholding obligations in an eventual agreement.

The chances that Palestinians would agree to negotiate on the basis of the Trump vision are nil. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas angrily dismissed the plan as a “conspiracy” that would eventually be relegated to the “the dustbin of history” while threatening to take the matter to the International Court of Justice

There are prominent international actors involved in the conflict.The two parties engaged in direct negotiation are the Israeli government, currently led by Benjamin Netanyahu, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), currently headed by Mahmoud Abbas. The official negotiations are mediated by an international contingent known as the Quartet on the Middle East (the Quartet) represented by a special envoy, which consists of the United States, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations. The Arab League is another important actor, which has proposed an alternative peace plan. Egypt, a founding member of the Arab League, has historically been a key participant. Jordan, having relinquished its claim to the West Bank in 1988 and holding a special role in the Muslim Holy shrines in Jerusalem, has also been a key participant.Since 2006, the Palestinian side has been fractured by conflict between the two major factions: Fatah, the traditionally dominant party, and its later electoral challenger, Hamas. After Hamas’s electoral victory in 2006, the Quartet conditioned future foreign assistance to the Palestinian National Authority (PA) on the future government’s commitment to non-violence, recognition of the State of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements. Hamas rejected these demands, which resulted in the Quartet’s suspension of its foreign assistance program, and the imposition of economic sanctions by the Israelis. A year later, following Hamas’s seizure of power in the Gaza Strip in June 2007, the territory officially recognized as the PA was split between Fatah in the West Bank, and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The division of governance between the parties had effectively resulted in the collapse of bipartisan governance of the PA. However, in 2014, a Palestinian Unity Government, composed of both Fatah and Hamas, was formed. The latest round of peace negotiations began in July 2013 and was suspended in 2014. The UN has permitted the PLO to title its representative office to the UN as “The Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations”, and Palestine has started to re-title its name accordingly on postal stamps, official documents and passports, whilst it has instructed its diplomats to officially represent ‘The State of Palestine’, as opposed to the ‘Palestine National Authority’. Additionally, on 17 December 2012, UN Chief of Protocol Yeocheol Yoon decided that “the designation of ‘State of Palestine’ shall be used by the Secretariat in all official United Nations documents”. However, in a speech in 2016 president Abbas said that “The Palestinian Authority exists and it is here,” and “The Palestinian Authority is one of our achievements and we won’t give it up.”

Fast forward to 2020; after nearly two years of delays and endless speculation, and with a beaming Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu standing by his side, Trump finally released his so-called “deal of the century” at an elaborate White House ceremony on 28th January 2020. Palestinian leaders, who had already rejected the plan unseen and have refused to deal with the Trump administration since its recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital in December 2017, were not invited to the unveiling. At first glance, the proposed plan appears to have an air of reasonability. It talks of a “realistic two-state solution” to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, pledges an unprecedented $50 billion in investment, and even mentions the words “Palestinian capital” and “Jerusalem” in the same sentence. Beyond the thin facade of acceptability, however, is a far more sinister agenda that is planned to do away with a legitimate two-state solution while normalizing enduring Israeli occupation and annexation within a de facto one-state reality.

A close scrutiny of Trump’s peace plan by regional experts reveal that despite its talk of “compromises” on “both sides,” the plan satisfies a long list of right-wing Israeli demands on virtually all core issues in the conflict i.e. from an undivided Jerusalem to annexing occupied territory to liquidating the rights of Palestinian refugees. Although the plan purports to be “realistic” and “fact-based,” it is mired in historical and political revisionism.Palestine’s borders, airspace, territorial waters, and electromagnetic sphere would remain under Israel’s control, while its government would be stripped of the ability to enter into treaties. Territorial contiguity would be reserved for Israel and its settlements, while Palestinians would get only “transportation contiguity” through a “state-of-the-art” network of bridges, roads, and tunnels.What’s more, the emergence of this encircled and disjointed Palestinian entity would itself be subject to numerous conditions, including an array of legal, political, fiscal, and security reforms, such as the disarming and pacification of Hamas in Gaza, with the ultimate decision on whether the conditions had been met left to Israel. One of the more disturbing elements of the Trump plan includes a proposal to swap areas of Israel proper that are currently heavily populated by Palestinian citizens of Israel to the so-called Palestinian state; an idea championed by racial purists on Israel’s far-right, who seek to reduce the number of non-Jews living in Israel.And above all Jerusalem, perhaps the most sensitive and contentious of all permanent standing issues, would remain undivided and under permanent Israeli sovereignty. Palestinians would be allowed to set up a capital near (but notably not in) the city of Jerusalem, which “could be named Al-Quds or another name as determined by the State of Palestine.”The malicious proposed plan also takes the issue of Palestinian refugees, including those who fled or were driven from their homes during Israel’s creation in 1948 and their descendants, off the table. While previous peace negotiations, including the Clinton Parameters of 2000 and the Annapolis negotiations of 2007-2008provided for at least a symbolic return of some refugees, the Trump plan states rather explicitly that there would be “no right of return by, or absorption of, any Palestinian refugee into the State of Israel.” Instead, Palestinian refugees would choose integration in their current host countries, resettlement in third countries, or absorption in the newly created Palestinian entity.

With its glossy cover, talk of a two-state solution, and the promise of billions of dollars in investment, Trump’s peace plan is little more than a piece of political malware cloaked as a credible diplomatic initiative.Therefore, within hours of the plan’s unveiling, Netanyahu announced that the process of extending Israeli sovereignty to areas not allocated to the Palestinian entity would be taken up by the Knesset, Israel’s parliament, within a matter of days. Trump’s ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, was quick to offer unqualified support for any such annexation.

The chances that Palestinians would agree to negotiate on the basis of the Trump vision are nil. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas angrily dismissed the plan as a “conspiracy” that would eventually be relegated to the “the dustbin of history” while threatening to take the matter to the International Court of Justice.Whether the Trump plan gains traction will depend on how it is received by key political actors internationally and at home.Already, several congressional Democrats and democratic presidential candidates, as well as various pro-peace groups, have publicly called out the Trump plan as a farce. The real threat to peace is not whether the Trump plan will fail but whether it will succeed. A lot depends on unified response by segments of Palestinians, Arab League, OIC, UNO, Muslim Countries in individual and collective capacities, and more importantly the Quartet including USA, Russia, EU and UN. For Pakistan, a clear Government stance is still awaited yet; nevertheless, the ominous side of this malevolent peace plan must provide a wakeup call to Pakistan’s decision makers who feel upbeat on Trump’s offer of mediation on Indian Occupied Kashmir. Please be forewarned!

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