

First Thoughts On the Trump Plan and How Mahmoud Abbas Will Save the Day

by Hugh Fitzgerald



“The Deal of the Century” turned out to be remarkably generous to the “Palestinians,” giving them far more than they had any right to expect. It promises them a state – the state of Palestine. It doubles the size of the territory under Palestinian control. The Palestinians will under the plan possess nearly 80% of the West Bank. They will also have their capital in East Jerusalem. The plan includes Palestinian use and management of facilities in Haifa and Ashdod ports, Palestinian development of a resort area in the north shore of the Dead Sea, and continued Palestinian agricultural activity in the Jordan Valley. Ultimately, the plan envisions “modern and efficient transportation links” through the future Palestinian state, including Gaza. The West Bank and Gaza will be linked through a tunnel.

Under the Trump plan, the Palestinians will be obligated to disarm Hamas and Islamic Jihad, must stop their Pay-For-Slay plan, must stop inciting terrorism, must end the rampant corruption in the PA, must respect human rights, and must guarantee a free press and religious freedom. We shall see if the PA is able to meet these conditions precedent to achieving a state. The PA's record to date is not encouraging.

The plan also requires Israel to observe a four-year moratorium on any new settlements in the West Bank while negotiations with the Palestinians are going on, but says nothing about whether the moratorium would continue if, after four years, negotiations are still continuing. It makes provision for \$50 billion in aid to be given to the Palestinians, as had previously been announced at the "Peace Through Prosperity" workshop in Manama last June. That is a huge sum, but who would pay it? One hopes that it will not be the Western Infidels paying for the Palestinians. The \$50 billion ought by rights to come from fellow Muslim Arabs, those who live in the oil-rich states of the Gulf – Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar.

The most important concession of all, according to Trump's peace initiative, would be the recognition of a new state, the State of Palestine. This State of Palestine would have to agree to be disarmed, but how that disarmament would be enforced, and exactly what arms it would include, remains unclear.

Israel also gets certain concessions. Existing Israeli settlements (that is, towns and cities) in the West Bank would be recognized as sovereign Israeli territory. The Palestinians would have to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. The Palestinian refugees, or "refugees" (the quotation marks indicate that these are the descendants of refugees, not true refugees themselves) would be integrated into the countries where they now live. There would be no right of return.

Netanyahu and Gantz have both declared themselves pleased with Trump's peace plan. But can they truly be pleased with the recognition of a State of Palestine, with its capital in East Jerusalem? Perhaps they are pleased because the plan is better than any of the previous plans presented by Trump's predecessors, and because they know that Abbas will never accept it, so they needn't worry. They can afford to be pleased. There is no other state in the world that has been successfully disarmed. How likely is it that a State of Palestine, full of Jihadis, could be permanently disarmed, and not become a source of terrorism against Israelis, whether living in the West Bank or elsewhere in Israel?

The plan is generally good, but I confess that I expected even better. I did not think this administration would recognize a State of Palestine with its capital in East Jerusalem. I envisioned instead an arrangement whereby the local Arabs (to be carefully referred to as "Palestinian Arabs") in the West Bank would be given as much autonomy as was consonant with Israeli security, but not a state. The safer the Israelis, the greater the degree of local autonomy. I see that I was wrong.

However, there is one thing about this plan that makes it most welcome. And that is the assurance that neither Mahmoud Abbas, nor any of his successors in the Palestinian Authority, nor anyone in Hamas, will be willing to negotiate over this plan in good faith. The Palestinians rejected Trump's plan before they knew what was in it; they reject it again now that they know what is in it. Much of the world will be able to see that even when the Palestinians are offered a state of their own, even when they are promised that that state's capital will be in East Jerusalem, even when they are further promised \$50 billion in aid, far more than any of the more than 100 developing countries have ever received. In aid, that is not enough to satisfy them. They are the spoiled brats of the international community.

Other Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain,

and Oman, will urge the Palestinians to take the deal – “You get a state, you have your capital in Jerusalem, the Israelis have to stop building settlements, you’ll have 80% of the West Bank” – “or else.” “Or else” would mean only this: “We are tired of your whining, tired of the whole Palestinian problem; tired of your refusal to accept \$50 billion in aid. We have so many bigger problems to think about, starting but not ending with Iran. Get with the program. Or count us out.” The refusal of the Palestinians to take the deal will only widen the gap between them and the other Arabs.

In agreeing to the Trump plan, Israel will have committed itself to not building new settlements in the West Bank for four years, while negotiations are going on. It’s a big concession. But if there are no negotiations, because the Palestinians continue to refuse enter into them, then the Trump administration has made clear that Israel is no longer required to refrain from settlement building. The Trump administration has noted that, in that case, it will support Israel should it decide to unilaterally incorporate other areas of the West Bank, beyond what it will already have annexed. And the offer of a State of Palestine will not be revived. And very few, at that point, will care.

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