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OPINION / DONALD TRUMP

What will Trump's 'ultimate deal' mean for Palestinians?

Recent leaks show that Trump is planning to establish a mini-Palestine only consisting of Gaza and half of West Bank.



by **Anders Persson**
28 Mar 2018



US President Donald Trump meets Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, US, March 5, 2018 [Kevin Lamarque/Reuters]

When Donald Trump was elected US president in November 2016, he initially signalled some real hope for the peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some analysts argued that he may actually manage to deliver what he calls "the deal of the century" and bring peace to Israel and Palestine. These assumptions were based on the fact that Trump is the type of person that could wake up one morning, say "enough", and pressure Israeli and Palestinian leaders to sign a peace deal on his terms.

Early on in his presidency, Trump made the conflict a strategic priority and unconventionally chose to go to the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Israel and Palestine) on his first trip abroad as president. During a press conference with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in Bethlehem, he said that "if Israel and the Palestinians can make peace, it will begin a process of peace all throughout the Middle East." This was in line with Europe's standard inside-out approach (Israeli-Palestinian peace first, Israeli-Arab normalisation later) to the conflict, which was also shared by the Obama administration.

On many other occasions, however, Trump seemed to be in favour of the outside-in approach (Israeli-Arab normalisation first, Israeli-Palestinian peace later) to the conflict. Moreover, he regularly changed his position in the debate - he was for, against and in between on key final status issues such as the settlements and moving the US embassy to Jerusalem, while never taking a clear stand for or against a two-state solution.

But on December 6 last year, Trump made it clear that his much-anticipated peace deal will favour Israel when he recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital and promised to move the US embassy there. This led Abbas to brand Trump's peace efforts as "the slap of the century" and say the US could no longer play any role in the Middle East peace process following the move.

Over the past five months, there have been at least three rounds of leaks signalling what Trump's peace plan may entail for the Palestinians.

In November 2017, it was reported that Trump's peace plan would oversee the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in an unspecified territory, but without Jerusalem as its capital and with all the settlements remaining. The report, based on the testimonies of anonymous senior officials on Israel's negotiating team, also signalled that Trump's plan would ignore the Palestinians' right of return and give the control of the Jordan Valley to Israel. Around the same time, it was also reported that Abbas was summoned to Riyadh and told by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to either accept Trump's peace plan or resign.

In February 2018, it was reported in Arab and Israeli media that Trump's peace plan would entail the relocation of some minor settlements, a possible Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem and some form of international protection for the holy sites in Jerusalem - seemingly an upgrade for the Palestinians, even if it still fell far short of their demands.

And, finally, earlier this month, it was reported in various media outlets that the PA's intelligence chief, Majid Faraj, has seen the latest version of the 35-page peace plan in Riyadh. According to Palestinian officials that spoke to the media on condition of anonymity, this version of the peace plan included the establishment of a Palestinian state with provisional borders on half of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, without Jerusalem, and with only humanitarian solutions to the refugee issue. The plan, moreover, calls for "building a new Jerusalem for the Palestinians from the city's surrounding villages" and also keeps Palestinian security and borders in the hands of Israel.

There seems to be consensus among the Palestinian leadership that Trump's plan, as it stands today, is something that "no Palestinian leader could accept". Abbas himself has said that the plan's objective is "to destroy the Palestinian national project".

Edward Said described the Oslo Accords as a "Palestinian surrender, a Palestinian Versailles" 25 years ago, so what should we call Trump's "deal of the century"? A mini-Palestine is perhaps the correct term, as it will only consist of Gaza and 50 percent of the West Bank - together amounting to no more than 11.5 percent of historic Palestine.

Last month, Nicky Haley, the US ambassador to the UN, said that "the plan won't be loved by either side", but so far there has been little, if any, critique in Israel against it. In fact, the plan seems to give Israel everything it wants. Trump's plan as it stands today

should be seen as a combination of several earlier Israeli proposals: the 1967 [Allon Plan](#) (in which Israel sought to control the West Bank's outer borders, except for a small corridor, and keep valuable territories but not major Palestinian population centers), the 1977 [Likud autonomy plan](#) (which sought autonomy for the Palestinian population but not for the territory), and the 2009 [Mofaz plan](#) (which sought to establish a Palestinian state with temporary borders on 60 percent of the West Bank, that, according to Mofaz, would have included 99 percent of the West Bank's Palestinian population).

The latest round of leaks also implies that Trump's peace plan will go ahead with or without the PA's approval. This would mean a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from parts of the West Bank if the Palestinians reject the plan, as they are widely expected to do. A unilateral Israeli withdrawal from parts of the West Bank is precisely what the INSS, the leading centre-left Israeli think-tank, has long [advocated](#) for.

In this context, it is worth remembering that a similar discussion to this one took place nearly 15 years ago, when Israel decided to unilaterally disengage from Gaza. Back then, when Ariel Sharon presented his plan to unilaterally disengage from Gaza, because he did not want to negotiate an agreement with Abbas, whom he [called](#) a "plucked chicken", many analysts said the Palestinians and the international community would not accept the legitimacy of the unilateral disengagement plan. But they all did. Gaza immediately became a valued prize for the rival Palestinian factions, the [EU](#) provided monitors for the Rafah crossing in southern Gaza, and Sharon's image was transformed in many parts of the world from a war criminal to a celebrated statesman. Could something like this happen this time as well?

It is important to note that it is still unclear whether a mini-Palestine on 50 percent of the West Bank is Trump's final bid. The first year of the Trump presidency has shown that he is a leader with an unprecedented ability to reverse himself. His many firings and hirings testify to this, and it is still unclear what his latest hiring, the ultra-hawk John Bolton as national security adviser, will mean for Trump's peace plan.

On the one hand, Bolton does not, at all, believe in the two-state solution, and less than a year ago he [said](#) that there "is no chance President Donald Trump will secure a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians". But, given the unpredictability of the president, it is difficult, at this stage, to predict how much influence Bolton will have on the peace plan.

If Trump's peace plan is as bad for the Palestinians as the recent leaks suggest, then its publication and perhaps unilateral implementation will lead to a much-needed reckoning for all other parties involved; for the Palestinians themselves, for the neighbouring Arab states, for the UN, for the EU, for [Russia](#), for China, for the [BDS](#) movement, for liberal Jewish groups in the US and for all others in the international community. This is not necessarily a bad thing for the Palestinians. It may finally unleash the Palestinian mass non-violent resistance that so many have called for, and it may lead the EU to become more assertive in the conflict. If the US tries to impose such a disastrous "solution", Russia and [China](#) may also feel the need to react.

For now, there is only one thing we know for sure: If Trump's peace plan is implemented, it will end the present status quo, which, everybody knows, is not a real status quo, but a constantly deteriorating situation for the Palestinians.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera's editorial stance.
