

How Joe Biden Rejected Trump's Peace Plan

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The Trump Administration's remarkably detailed peace plan, set out in 179 pages of text and two pages of maps, is the fruit of 2½ years of intensive labor by Jared Kushner and a half-dozen others. For the first time, according to this plan, Israel would recognize a State of Palestine, with its capital in what, arguably, can be considered part of East Jerusalem – concessions that are vehemently opposed by the Yesha Council representing many Jews living in the West Bank. The significance of the Israeli concessions has been ignored by much of the media, because it gets in the way of the agreed-upon narrative, which is that the Trump Administration has been grossly unfair to the Palestinians in its determination

to “give Israel everything it wants.” This phrase, endlessly repeated, mischaracterizes the detailed and comprehensive handiwork of those who crafted the Administration’s peace initiative. Only those who have read the plan in its entirety (at www.whitehouse.gov) have a right to comment on it; media summaries have hardly done justice to what it promises the Palestinians. Four-fifths of the plan is devoted to the many economic benefits that the Palestinians will reap from agreeing to make peace, with a contemplated \$50 billion investment in the health, education, vocational and professional training, infrastructure (schools, roads, bridges, tunnels), housing, utilities (electricity, water, Internet), expanded employment, new businesses – all for the Palestinians in their new state of Palestine.

Cynics – and a great many in our media and political elites have decided cynicism is the only permissible reaction when it comes to the “Deal of the Century” – treat this plan not as a genuine effort at forging a sustainable peace, but merely a case of Trump trying to curry favor with Jewish and evangelical Christian voters and, at the same time, to deflect attention from the impeachment proceedings. And, these cynics add, Prime Minister Netanyahu, who faces charges in Israel of corruption (because in the past he accepted gifts of cigars and champagne), must also have wanted the plan to be released when it was in order to help him in his own effort to deflect attention from his legal difficulties at home. But the impeachment proceedings have been going on for four months; had the Trump Plan been introduced at any time, before, during, or after the impeachment business, Trump would still have been accused of attempting to exploit the Deal of the Century to deflect the public’s attention. Similarly, Prime Minister Netanyahu’s legal troubles have been going on for many months and will continue to do so; there was no way to predict when release of the peace plan would do him the most good. The plan was a complicated affair, and when it was finally ready, with every rhetorical wrinkle in those 181

pages ironed out, it was released. There is no evidence that its release was either delayed, or rushed, in order to help out either Trump or Netanyahu in their domestic politics.

None of the four Democratic front-runners – Biden, Sanders, Warren, and Buttegieg, had anything good to say about the Trump Plan. They were far harsher on the plan than were many of the Arabs themselves in their initial responses. Those from Egypt, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Oman were fairly mild, even praising Trump for his effort and calling for renewed dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians, based on the plan as a starting point, and under the auspices of the United States. Those early responses were the result of three things: First, the Arab calculation that they need President Trump's support in any conflict with Iran and wish not to displease him; second, the recognition by several Arab states – Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt – that Israel is their most valuable regional ally against the Iranian threat and they don't want Israel weakened by being pushed to make too many concessions to the Palestinians; third, after seven decades, the Arab states are becoming increasingly fatigued with the whole "Palestinian cause," weary of the Palestinian demands, and no longer interested in sacrificing their national interests for the Palestinians and their tiresome, prevaricating, grasping, and demanding leader, Mahmoud Abbas.

Those initial responses of mild approval gave way, at a meeting of the Arab League in Cairo on February 1, to a unanimous rejection of the Trump Plan, and then, a few days later, to its rejection again, this time by the O.I.C. (the Organization of the Islamic Conference). Those Arab states that had originally supported the plan as a "praiseworthy effort" did not want to stand out from the other Arabs at a meeting of the full 22-member League; they preferred to keep their heads down, and vote with the rest of the group, for fear of being tarred as "collaborators and sellouts to Netanyahu and Trump." In such circumstances, they didn't want

to take a risk of antagonizing the Arab street, whipped up by the Palestinian propagandists against the regimes of those who did not denounce the plan. And Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Bahrain, Oman, Morocco – all of which had originally lent their cautious support to the plan – had to worry not just about other Arab states attacking their position, but especially about Iran, with its vast propaganda apparatus, ready to pounce on those Arab states it could depict as in Trump’s – and Netanyahu’s – pocket. Given such potential threats, it was prudent of those countries to reverse their initial responses, and vote along with the other Arabs at the Arab League Meeting in Cairo on February 1 to reject the Trump proposal, and to do it again, this time joining 56 other Muslim states at the meeting of the O.I.C. in Riyadh a few days later, in rejecting the Trump peace initiative.

The responses of the Democratic candidates, which can be found [here](#), are worth examining, for they were not even as positive as were, initially, those of a half-dozen Arab states. Let’s start with Joe Biden, whose campaign slogan is “No Malarkey”:

Former vice president Joe Biden called the outline counterproductive and warned against settlement annexations.

Biden refers to the “outline,” which raises the obvious question: did he not read the whole plan, in all of its impressive detail, set out in 181 pages, before commenting on it? If he did not, he has no business commenting on it. “Whereof we do not know, thereof we should not speak” – Wittgenstein, too, believed in “no malarkey.” Study the plan, look carefully at the two maps, and only then, Joe Biden, based on your newly-acquired detailed knowledge, of Trump’s Deal of the Century, will you have earned the right to comment on it.

When Biden claims that the plan is “counterproductive” he means this: the Palestinians are furious with the plan, and

because it's so "unfair" they won't enter into negotiations. Instead of creating the conditions for peace, the Trump Plan has thus pushed the parties farther apart. But there is nothing new about the Palestinians throwing temper tantrums and refusing to negotiate. It's not this plan alone that they object to; it's any plan that doesn't give them everything they want. The Palestinians haven't been willing to enter into negotiations with Israel for many years now. Even when the Arafat was offered 97% of the West Bank by Ehud Barak, at the Taba Summit in January 2001, during Carter's presidency, the Palestinians refused to accept it. Arafat repeatedly refused to take anything less than a complete return by Israel to the 1949 Armistice Lines. Mahmoud Abbas similarly refused an offer from then-Prime Minister Olmert to give the Palestinians 95% of the West Bank. Abbas has continued to repeat the maximalist claim: the creation of a Palestinian state, including the entire West Bank; the withdrawal of Israel to the 1949 Armistice Lines; Jerusalem, including the Old City, with the Western Wall and the Temple Mount, to become the undivided capital of a Palestinian state, and finally, the "return of the refugees," meaning – uniquely for this very special group of refugees – that children and grandchildren of the Arab refugees, more than 5 million of them, can return to what is now Israel, and demographically overwhelm the Jewish people in their one small state.

What is truly "counterproductive" is to continue to allow Abbas and his fellow Palestinians to labor under the delusion that they can continue to reject negotiations with Israel unless they receive, in advance, assurances that their maximalist demands will be met, and to do so while – still more infuriating – claiming they have no intention of negotiating either with Trump or with the Israelis. The plan includes an important timetable: Israel has agreed, in still another concession, not to build any new settlements in the West Bank during the next four years, as long as negotiations with the Palestinians are going on. There is now time pressure

put on the Palestinians to negotiate in good faith. For if no final agreement is reached in that time, then the Israelis can, in the American view, resume settlement-building. That is not a “counterproductive” condition, but one more likely to lead to an agreement, if the Palestinians finally understand the consequences either of not negotiating, or of not doing so in good faith by continuing to make demands that have no prospect of being accepted by Israel. Meanwhile the clock is running on the moratorium agreed to by Israel on new settlement building.

Of course, this need for the Palestinians to grasp the nettle of negotiation before the four-year moratorium on settlement building runs out assumes that the Palestinian leaders will behave rationally. They tend to let their rages get the better of them. Let us remember that in February 2019, Mahmoud Abbas refused to take the tax money Israel collected for it, because Israel insisted on deducting from the amount it transferred to the P.A. the same amount that the P.A. provided to terrorists and their families. This meant that the PA was forfeiting about \$170 million a year, because it would not accept any money collected for it by the Jewish State as long as Israel deducted from the amount it transferred the \$14 million a month that the PA diverted to its Pay-For-Slay program. After having declared he would never take the reduced tax payments, Mahmoud Abbas quietly capitulated. And now he accepts what Israel gives him – the taxes collected minus a sum equal to what the PA provides to the terrorists and their families in their “Pay-For-Slay” program.

In his remarks so far on the Trump peace initiative, Joe Biden saw nothing to praise and much to deplore:

“A peace plan requires two sides to come together. This is a political stunt that could spark unilateral moves to annex territory and set back peace even more. I’ve spent a lifetime working to advance the security & survival of a Jewish and democratic Israel. This is not the way,” Biden said.

Does Joe Biden know that the “two sides” have not “come together” because Mahmoud Abbas has refused to negotiate in good faith with Israel for many years? Even now Abbas will not discuss the Trump Peace Plan, a discussion that commits him to nothing. He hasn’t even bothered to read it, so how does he know just how terrible it is? Abbas maintains that he will only enter into discussions with Israel if he is given a guarantee that the final outcome will satisfy his demands as to a complete Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, replaced by a State of Palestine with Jerusalem as its undivided capital. He wants the outcome of the negotiations set in stone before the parties negotiate. He has also made clear that the State of Palestine in all of the West Bank will require the uprooting of 450,000 Israelis who are now living there, to make the territory just as the Palestinians want it – free of Jews, Judenrein. 1.9 million Arabs now live in Israel, and no one even hints at removing them, but in the Palestinian view, no Jews should be allowed to live in a “State of Palestine.”

When Biden says that Trump’s peace plan is a “political stunt,” he adds his voice to the chorus of those – there are so many! – who refuse to believe that this is a good-faith effort at fashioning a plan that meets the reasonable needs of both sides. For Israel, its security is enhanced, through permanent control of the critical Jordan Valley, that bestrides the invasion route from the East, and also by annexation of Jewish settlements in the West Bank. These settlements do not only provide housing for Jews, but also do double duty as defense outposts, filled as they are with settlers who, like all Israelis, have served in the IDF and remain as Reservists until the age of 40. Further, the Trump plan requires the demilitarization of the State of Palestine. Israel will retain control of the skies over that State. Aside from security matters, Israel will allow the Palestinians complete control over their own lives in their own state. And what’s more, they will be the beneficiaries of what is

certainly the most generous program of international aid and development since the Marshall Plan. And while the Marshall Plan sought to improve the lives of people in a dozen war-torn European states, the Trump peace initiative is aimed at improving the lives of the Palestinians alone. If the Palestinian leaders change their minds, and accept the plan – they would be fools not to – Palestine will be the most coddled new state in history.

If what Israel needs most is security, what the Palestinians most need is prosperity. The corruption and mismanagement of their leaders, both in the West Bank and in Gaza, needs to be dealt with, and the Trump plan puts in place proposals to promote good government, responsive to its people through monitored elections and a professional civil service to replace the rampant spoils system. Four-fifths of the Trump plan is devoted to improving the lives of the Palestinians. Biden dismisses the plan as a “political stunt”; he claims to know this by having read “some outline” of the plan that he read. That “outline” is no substitute for reading the entire, extraordinarily detailed plan. He should not say anything more before he has read the Trump plan. Biden appears not to have understood the magnitude of the concessions Israel has made in indicating its willingness to recognize an independent State of Palestine, with its capital in East Jerusalem, and in agreeing to a four-year moratorium on any future settlement building, as long as the Palestinians are engaged in good-faith negotiations. Neither he, nor Sanders, nor Warren, nor any of the other Democratic candidates has yet said a word about the concessions Israel has shown itself willing to make under the Trump Plan. This careful document, which so much thought has gone into, is no “political stunt.” It shows a way forward, if only the Palestinians show enough sense not to reject it out of hand. So far the signs are not good.

Biden says he has “spent a lifetime working to advance the security and survival of a Jewish and democratic Israel.” He

served as Vice President under Barack Obama, who was the most anti-Israel president since Jimmy Carter; it was during Obama's administration that Washington refused to veto a Security Council resolution claiming that Israel's settlements "on Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem" have "no legal validity" and demanding a halt to "all Israeli settlement activities," saying this "is essential for salvaging the two-state solution." In December 2016 Obama instructed Ambassador Powers not to veto this shameful resolution. Did Biden say anything about the resolution at the time? Has he said anything since?

The resolution reiterated that Israeli settlement was a "flagrant violation" of "international law."

But which "international law"? Not the international law that has long recognized the right of a victor in a defensive war to hold onto territory it deems necessary for its defense. Not the international law that was created when the League of Nations established the Mandates system, and in particular, the legal regime created by the provisions of the Mandate for Palestine. Not the international law that allowed Israel, by U.N. Resolution 242, to make such territorial adjustments as it deemed necessary for attaining "secure and recognized boundaries."

No, the international law that was being invoked was the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the forcible transfer of a civilian population into another area or country. Its framers had in mind the forcible transfer of millions of people by the Nazis, some sent to work as slave laborers in Germany, others to be killed. But the Israelis who have moved into the West Bank since 1967 were not "forcibly" moved; they did so voluntarily, eagerly. The Fourth Geneva Convention does not apply to their move into, and settlement on, the West Bank. These voluntary settlers moved onto lands that, furthermore, the Jews had a claim based on 2,000 years of history, that was recognized by both the Balfour

Declaration and the League of Nations' Mandate for Palestine – a claim superior to that of any other claimant, including Jordan, which was merely a military occupier from 1949 to 1967.

Biden tells us he has always been working “to advance the security and safety of a Jewish and democratic Israel.” How did he do it when he was Vice President? Did he try to convince President Obama to veto the resolution about the supposed “illegality” of the settlements? When did he stand up for Israel behind the scenes? What bureaucratic battles did he fight for the Jewish state from within the Administration? Even if he did fight such battles, he clearly didn't win any – the Obama administration remained deeply unsympathetic to Israel. Still, one would like to hear from Biden about all he has done for Israel's security, not just in voting for aid packages when he was a Senator, but what he has done behind the scenes, in the corridors of power, to make the case for Israel.

If Joe Biden has been fighting for the “security” of Israel during his whole political life, he can hardly be unaware that Israel's military men are unanimous in insisting that Israel must hold onto, and annex, the Jordan Valley, and it must continue to control other parts of the West Bank as well, by annexing the existing settlements, which should be conceived of as both residential areas and as military outposts, given the military training all Israeli Jews receive, and the updated training Israelis are given when they perform their annual reservist duties (as miluim) which they do up to the age of 40.

Israel's security fears are well justified. It has had to fight more wars than any other country on earth. The Jewish state has had to fight three major wars (1948-49, 1967, 1973) for its survival, as well as three smaller wars in Gaza against Hamas (Operation Cast Lead, 2008-2009, Operation Pillar of Defense, 2012, and Operation Protective Edge, 2014),

and two wars in Lebanon, one against the PLO in 1982, and another against Hezbollah in 2006. And then there have been constant attacks by Palestinian terrorists on Israeli civilians, on schools, on buses, at bus stops, at Passover gatherings, at pizza parlors.

Can Joe Biden be that arrogant as to dismiss what Israeli military men think Israel, at a minimum, must hold onto for its security? And what does Biden think of the report by a delegation of American military men sent by the Joint Chiefs on President Johnson's order, to visit Israel in 1967 after the Six-Day War and to report on Israel's security needs there? The report they prepared stressed that the minimum conditions for Israel's security required it to retain the Jordan Valley and other areas, too, of the West Bank. But what do professional military men, at the highest level, American or Israeli, know about military matters? Joe Biden knows better.

Israel is now willing, under Trump's initiative, to double the size of the territory the Palestinians would possess in their newly-created state. They will possess 70% of the total land area of the West Bank, while Israel would retain only 30%. Again, this is one of the startling concessions by Israel that it was not required to make, either according to the provisions of the Palestine Mandate, which recognized the Jewish claim to all of Western Palestine, from the Jordan to the Mediterranean, or according to U.N. Resolution 242, which allows for territorial adjustments by Israel in order to ensure that it has "secure [i.e. defensible] and recognized boundaries."

Joe Biden's four-sentence dismissal of a 180-page peace plan – he's only seen the "outline" – is deplorable. This is the first peace plan proposed for Israel and the Palestinians that recognizes that the Jihad against Israel is permanent, and that the Jewish state must not trust to agreements alone for its security, but needs to create, and maintain, the

conditions for a credible deterrence. That is what the Trump Peace Plan does. It gives Israel what it most needs, security, and gives the Palestinians what they most need, prosperity. Many people, heedless of the real aims of the Palestinians and other Muslims, do not understand that the only reliable guarantor of the peace between Arabs and Israelis is the IDF, with its regular forces supplemented by the civilians living in settlements in 30% of the West Bank, both providing the deterrence that keeps the peace.

Read the Trump plan, Joe, the whole thing, then get back to us. Look at all the benefits – housing, health, education, medical care, jobs, business creation, infrastructure of all kinds – that are to be lavished on the Palestinians. And look, too, at the provisions having to do with creating the minimum conditions of Israel's security. Do those provisions, about a demilitarized state of Palestine, seem unreasonable to you, given Israel's size, and the many wars Israel has had to fight to survive? Could you tell us, Joe, what the Palestine Mandate has to say about "close settlement by Jews on the land" everywhere west of the river Jordan, and why that still matters? And finally, Joe, can you explain to us what U.N. Resolution 242 says about Israel's right, after the Six-Day War, to make territorial adjustments in order to create for itself "secure and recognized borders"?

Remember, Joe, your campaign slogan. No more malarkey. Especially not about the peace initiative. It's a last best hope. Okay?

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