

Palestinians Are “Disappointed” In Initial Arab Response – Arab League Then Rejects the Trump Plan

by Hugh Fitzgerald



There was deep disappointment among the Palestinian leaders with the initial response of the Arabs to the Trump peace-and-prosperity plan. Their complaint can be read [here](#).

A senior official in the Palestinian Authority has spoken of Ramallah’s disappointment in Arab nations’ muted and sometimes-supportive response to the contentious US proposal for solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, saying the PA had been hoping “for much better.”

Anyone who has read the 181-page (179 pages of text, two pages of maps) document – the Trump peace initiative – which sets out, in great detail, every possible benefit that is to be lavished on the “Palestinians” if they agree to make an enforceable peace, will find it hard to imagine anything more generous. Fifty billion dollars in aid are to be spent on the Palestinians. Billions will go to new infrastructure – roads, bridges, tunnels – to increase the mobility of people and goods. Other billions will be spent on hospitals to provide the Palestinians with health care meeting Western standards. Schools at all levels will be built, with \$500 million to be spent on one university alone. The educational system will have a curriculum that emphasizes STEM subjects. New electric plants will be constructed to ensure continual availability of affordable electricity in the West Bank and Gaza. A doubling of the potable water supply per capita will be made available to the Palestinians. More investments will enable all Palestinians access to high-speed data services. Money will be made available for vocational and technical training. Civil service jobs will be filled based on merit rather than political connections, as has happened under the PA and Hamas. A legal regime providing transparency and security for investors, while strictly punishing corruption, will be established, in order to attract foreign investors.

The end result, according to the plan, would be a decrease in the Palestinian unemployment rate from above 30% to below 10%, a halving of the poverty rate for Palestinians, and at least a doubling of the Palestinian GDP. This prosperity for the new State of Palestine would have further benefits, as an engine of economic growth within a regional system that would include Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon.

Mahmoud Abbas claims not to have bothered to read the 181-page plan. How can he be sure he needs to reject it out of hand? Because he knows that Israel will be able to hold onto the Jordan Valley and its West Bank settlements. But he hasn't

been asked to accede to everything laid out in the plan. He's been asked to study the plan, to take it seriously, and then not to accede to everything it lays out, but to use the plan as the basis for good faith negotiations, which is a different thing. But he won't do even that. Abbas wants to be assured of the final disposition of the West Bank before entering into negotiations on, among other things, the final disposition of the West Bank.

If the PA had been hoping for "much better," given all the careful thought that went into this plan whose primary purpose is to bring not just peace, but prosperity to the Palestinians, it must be disabused, by the Trump Administration, of any such hope. Anyone who studies the plan, downloadable at www.whitehouse.gov, will see how it has been so carefully crafted, to lift the Palestinians from their wretched state of relying on incessant handouts from others, to genuine prosperity, generated by their own enterprise and hard work.

Hussein al-Sheikh, PA Civil Affairs Minister, member of the Fatah Central Committee and a close confidant of President Mahmoud Abbas, said there was concern that Arab nations, who the PA had hoped would back their position, may become a "dagger in [the] Palestinian people's side."

He needn't have worried. After initially seeming to give approval to the Trump Plan, the Arab states met in Cairo and, as a body, rejected the Trump Plan. Bahrain, the UAE, and Oman, whose ambassadors had attended the roll-out of the plan at the White House, a way of giving it their approval, changed their minds in Cairo. Those Arab countries that had initially issued statements of mild praise for the plan, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco, similarly voted to reject it at the Arab League meeting on February 1. No need for Hussein al-Sheikh to worry about the Arab states becoming "a dagger in [the] Palestinian people." In Cairo, the Arab foreign

ministers collectively allowed themselves to be bullied by the hysterics of Mahmoud Abbas, even though it is he who has to go hat in hand to beg for alms from these very countries. And even though many of these countries are becoming increasingly weary of the Palestinian conflict that once seemed so central but now, in light of the threat from Iran, has been reduced in importance, they still voted to uphold the rejectionist stance of the Palestinians. The Arab states most alarmed by Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait, have their own reasons for wanting Israel, as Iran's most potent enemy in the region, to remain strong, and not to be squeezed back within something like the 1967 armistice lines, as the Palestinians demand. They want Israeli deterrence to remain effective against Iran. Yet they too, having previously issued encouraging statements about the Trump Plan, as a valuable basis for negotiations, voted to reject it in Cairo. Were they all so afraid of the Arab Street? Was there a fear of being painted as collaborators of Trump and Netanyahu? Were they afraid of being accused by Iran of being "collaborators" with the Big and Little Satans? Why, within three days, did a half-dozen Arab states completely change their public attitude from Yes to No?

The Palestinians, who even before the release said they would reject the plan, have firmly maintained that position.

If any of those Palestinian rejectionists bothered to read the whole plan, they would see that 80% of it is devoted to ways to improve the lives of Palestinians, from education and health care to provision of electricity and water, to infrastructure (roads, bridges, tunnels) that would speed up commuter and delivery times, to bringing data services up to Western (i.e., Israeli) standards, to supplying vocational training to Palestinians for jobs in high tech. The aim is to decrease unemployment by at least two-thirds, to cut the numbers of Palestinians living in poverty by half, and to double the Palestinian GDP, all within ten years.

“We were hoping that the Arab position would be much better than that,” Sheikh told Al Jazeera Thursday night. “But the real test is on Saturday at the Arab League meeting.

“In every meeting with our Arab brothers, we did not demand that the Arabs fight America or Israel on our behalf,” Sheikh said. “We asked them for the minimum position...We asked them to tell the Americans: ‘What the Palestinians accept, we accept. And what the Palestinians reject, we reject.’”

“We hope that our whole Arab nation will be a supportive force for us and not a dagger in the Palestinian people’s side,” Sheikh said.

The plan grants Israel much of what it has sought in decades of international diplomacy, namely control over Jerusalem as its “undivided” capital, rather than a city to share with the Palestinians, who would have the capital of a potential state in the East Jerusalem area – but without the coveted Old City and surrounding neighborhoods. The plan also lets Israel annex West Bank settlements, and rules out the return of Palestinian refugees to Israeli territory.

Making provision for the Palestinian capital to be just on the outskirts of Jerusalem, most likely in the suburb of Abu Dis, would still allow the Palestinians to describe their capital as being in “Al Quds” (Jerusalem).

As for not permitting the return of refugees, the Palestinian “refugees” are unique in the world, for out of the hundreds of millions of refugees since the beginning of World War II, only the Palestinians have been allowed to describe the children and grandchildren (and so on through the generations) of refugees as “refugees” themselves. If these refugees, as so capaciously defined, were permitted to return to Israel, that would mean more than 5 million Arabs would arrive, thus swamping the Jews of Israel. That would be the end of the Jewish state. And that is something Israel, understandably,

cannot accept.

When the Trump Plan was first rolled out at the White House, three Arab ambassadors – from Bahrain, the UAE, and Oman – were in attendance, in seeming support of the plan. Still other Arab countries – Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco – released remarks that treated the Trump Plan as a praiseworthy effort that could serve as the basis for serious negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

The Israelis, of course, were also present at the launch, and pleased with the plan, even though it required them to recognize a “State of Palestine” with its capital on the outskirts of East Jerusalem. These were major concessions by the Israelis that have not been sufficiently appreciated.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who stood alongside Trump in the White House as the US leader presented the plan, immediately declared his support for the scheme.

He also initially said Israel would immediately move to annex the Jordan Valley and West Bank settlements with Washington’s okay – only to have the White House clarify quickly that there was no approval for immediate annexation moves.

“Is it reasonable for the Arabs to become applauders for Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu in the 2nd or 3rd row?” Sheikh asked, apparently referring to ambassadors of the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman, who also attended the rollout ceremony.

“Is it reasonable for the Arabs to applaud the division of the Al-Aqsa? Is it reasonable for the Arabs to applaud al-Quds being the capital of Israel?” he added, using the Arabic name for Jerusalem.

There is no division of Al-Aqsa in the Trump Plan. It remains just as it is now, under the control of the Jordanian

religious authorities. As for Jerusalem, as already noted above, in the Trump plan, provision is made for the Palestinians to have their capital in a part of East Jerusalem that falls outside Israel's security barrier – probably the suburb of Abu Dis. The Palestinians are free, of course, to rename that part of East Jerusalem as Al-Quds.

Sheikh also expressed his appreciation to Jordanian King Abdullah for his “strong and solid” position in stressing that the peace deal must include key Palestinian demands that are currently not part of the proposal.

Abdullah could not have done anything else. He is the weak king of a weak country. More than 70% of Jordan's population consists of Palestinians – that is, people whose parents or grandparents arrived from west of the Jordan River. Abdullah cannot afford to antagonize them, and must, therefore, parrot the Palestinian demands, no matter how unrealistic they may be. But what about much more powerful Arab states? When the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Bahrain, and Oman all voted at the meeting of the Arab League on February 1 to reject the very plan they had three days before found praiseworthy, it was deeply disappointing.

Abdullah spoke with Abbas on Friday and assured him that Amman would stand by Ramallah's side “in the fight to achieve [their] rightful independent state, in accordance with the 1967 borders.”

Let's remind ourselves, and King Abdullah as well, that when Jordan held the West Bank from 1949 to 1967, his father King Hussein did nothing to create a “Palestinian state” in that territory, but instead treated it as part of Jordan. In the same way, Egypt – which held Gaza – made no effort to create a Palestinian entity in the Strip. Of course, for both Jordan and Egypt, the “Palestinian people” had not yet been invented, so a “Palestinian state” was superogatory.

Jordan has also said it rejects any unilateral move by Israel, referring to the settlement annexation plan.

Note to King Abdullah and his advisors:

1. Please read the Mandate for Palestine, especially the Preamble, and Articles 4 and 6, and study the accompanying Mandate maps.

2. Please read U.N. Resolution 242, with accompanying commentary on its meaning by its author, Lord Caradon.

The Palestinians have angrily rejected the entire plan.

The Palestinians have “angrily rejected” every peace plan that’s been offered them, including one which would have given them 97% of the West Bank, and another that would have given them 95%. They clearly do not believe in compromise. They want the entire West Bank, guaranteed to be theirs in advance of any negotiation. There is no way for Israel, or the United States, to deal with such a refractory party. The Trump peace-and-prosperity initiative offers the Palestinians an endless cornucopia of benefits – read the 181 -page report (179 pages of text, with 2 of maps) and see if I’ve exaggerated – and still they won’t take it. Worse, they won’t even read the plan. Their minds are made up. A hundred countries would jump at the chance to have such an offer made to them, but not the Palestinians. And Abbas managed to pull one last rabbit out of the hat when, on February 1, at a special meeting of the Arab League held in Cairo, the foreign ministers unanimously agreed to reject the Trump peace plan. We’ll see if that is their last word on the plan, or whether, in their own national interests, some will – away from the insensate pressure of 22 Arab League members meeting as a group – again reconsider, and quietly suggest to Abbas that the Trump plan at least deserves to be looked at.

“This conspiracy deal will not pass. Our people will take it to the dustbin of history,” Abbas said Tuesday. “We say a thousand times: No, no and no to the ‘deal of the century.’”

It’s the “Palestinians” who do not realize that this is likely the best deal – not a “conspiracy deal” – that they will ever be offered, and that from here on out, they will increasingly be on their own, as Arab states attend to their own worries and national interests. Three of the most important Arab states – Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE – likely voted as they did in Cairo only in order not to be depicted as less steadfast in the Palestinian cause than Turkey or Iran, and not because they truly found the Trump plan objectionable.

Both the Saudi Crown Prince and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi recognize that a strong Israel is their most useful ally in containing Iran. They voted in Cairo as the Palestinians wanted, but without, one suspects, any particular enthusiasm. Having given Mahmoud Abbas his desired hollow victory with the Arab League vote, these countries can now return to their security collaboration with Israel against Iran, as their national interests dictate. And the Palestinians will be very much on their own.

While the Arab states rejected the Trump Plan collectively after a vote of the Arab League on February 1, Western countries are still evaluating the plan.

Many Western countries and international bodies said they needed time to assess the plan, reiterating their support for the longtime international consensus favoring a two-state solution to the conflict on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

Again we have the deliberate avoidance of any mention of the Palestine Mandate, and the territory, including all of the land from the Jordan to the Mediterranean, that it included.

If “many Western countries” believe that the “two-state solution to the conflict” should be based on the “basis of the pre-1967 borders,” they haven’t been paying attention either to the Palestine Mandate, or to the meaning of U.N. Resolution 242 as set out by its author, Lord Caradon.

Article 80 of the U.N. Charter (known as the “Jewish People’s Article”) reiterated the continuing relevance, for the U.N., as the successor organization to the League of Nations, of the Palestine Mandate’s provisions and maps. Israel retained, and retains, its legal claim to the territory assigned to the Palestine Mandate. Further, U.N. Resolution 242 does not say anything about either a two-state solution or about an Israeli withdrawal “on the basis of the pre-1967 borders [sic for 1949 armistice lines].” Israel is permitted by U.N. Resolution 242 to make territorial adjustments that will ensure that it has “secure [i.e. defensible] and recognizable borders.”

And though the proposal provides for a Palestinian state, it falls far short of Palestinian hopes for a return of all the territories captured by Israel during the Six Day War in 1967.

Israel has a legal claim – or rather, two independent claims – to retaining control of the West Bank. The first is the Palestine Mandate itself. All of the territory from Mt. Hermon in the north to the Red Sea in the south, and from the Jordan River in the east, to the Mediterranean in the west, was assigned to the Mandate for incorporation into the Jewish National Home, which would then become the State of Israel. Jordan managed to seize the West Bank in the 1948-1949 war, and to hold onto it until the Six-Day War in 1967, as the military occupier, but without a legal claim. When Israel wrested the West Bank from Jordan in 1967, it was finally in a position to enforce the legal claim to the West Bank that it had never relinquished.

The second claim is based on U.N. Resolution 242 (1967), which – as its chief drafter, British ambassador to the U.N. Lord Caradon, noted – allowed Israel to make territorial adjustments so as to retain territory it needed in order to possess “secure and recognized borders.” Lord Caradon explicitly rejected the Arab attempt to have Resolution 242 require Israeli withdrawal “from all the territories” occupied in the recent conflict; instead, he insisted, Israel was only required to withdraw from “territories,” based on its security needs. Israeli military men are in agreement that to have “secure and recognized borders,” Israel has to retain the Jordan Valley and some parts of the West Bank. In 1967 President Johnson asked the Joint Chiefs to send a military delegation to Israel to report on the territory that Israel would have to retain for its security; the American military men concluded that Israel would have to retain, in the West Bank, the Jordan Valley at a minimum. They also thought Israel should maintain control over other strategic parts of the West Bank, a sliver of the Sinai, Gaza, and the Golan. Israel decided, in the end, to return the entire Sinai to Egypt, amounting to 88% of the total territory Israel won in the Six-Day War, and to withdraw from Gaza to allow self-rule by the Gazan Palestinians. But the West Bank and the Golan were a different matter. Israel has annexed the Golan Heights, from which for almost twenty years the Syrians rained down fire on the Israeli farmers below. As for the West Bank, the IDF believed that retention of part of the West Bank, aside from the Jordan Valley, was necessary if Israel were to be able to control the invasion route from the east, holding off invaders and buying time until Israel’s reservists could be mobilized.

Egypt, the first Arab country to reach a peace deal with Israel, urged Israelis and Palestinians to carefully study the plan, and Saudi Arabia expressed support for a return to negotiations. The European Union said it needed to study the outline more closely.

The United Arab Emirates called it “an important starting point.” Qatar welcomed the initiative but stressed its support for a Palestinian state “including East Jerusalem” as its capital.

Those were their initial remarks. But four days later, in Cairo, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, and Oman had changed their minds, or pretended to, and voted with the rest of the members of the Arab League to reject the Trump Plan. That plan was no longer “an important starting point,” but needed to be rejected.

Iran and Turkey had [immediately] both rejected the proposal. Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei called the plan “satanic” and vowed that it would never be implemented, while Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared it as “absolutely unacceptable.”

It is fascinating that while many Arab states (though not Jordan) had initially praised the Trump peace plan as a “starting point” for further negotiations, two non-Arab states – Turkey and Iran – were virulently opposed as soon as the plan was announced. And their opposition put those Arab states that had first praised the plan in a bind. If they continued to be seen as favoring the Trump Plan, the Iranians and Turks would undoubtedly have carried on a propaganda campaign against these “Arab sellouts and collaborators with Trump and Netanyahu.” That was something the Arab leaders wanted to avoid. Hence they decided to go along with the group, whatever their inner reservations, and voted to reject the plan.

Regionally, Arab states in the Gulf have moved closer to the Jewish state in recent years amid shared hostility to Iran.

It is not only that the Arab states of the Gulf – Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain (Qatar is the odd man out,

being shunned by the other countries precisely because of its friendly ties with Iran) – share with Israel a “hostility” toward Iran. It is that Israel is their most useful and potent ally against Iran. It is Israel that launched Stuxnet, that startlingly successful demonstration of cyberwarfare, which caused Iranian centrifuges to speed up and self-destruct; it is Israel that assassinated key Iranian nuclear scientists; it is Israel that smuggled out of Tehran to the West thousands of Iranian nuclear records; it is Israel that has repeatedly bombed Iranian bases in Syria and, so far, prevented Iran from establishing permanent sites in that country; it is Israel that shares intelligence on Iran with Saudi Arabia and the UAE (and possibly with Egypt, too). Finally, Israel’s steady anti-Iran voice in the corridors of power in Washington is recognized and appreciated by the Gulf Arabs.

Must the Trump Plan, over which a half-dozen people labored for 2½ years, after this Arab League rejection, be relegated, as Abbas claims, “to the dustbin of history,” or can it be revived? Despite voting as they did, Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E., Bahrain, Egypt, and Oman still have to face an implacable Iran, making trouble through its proxies, the Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Shi’a militias in Iraq. Therefore, they still have need of Israel. Their security ties with the Jewish state will remain in place. Abbas has perhaps been fooled by this Arab League vote into assuming that the “Palestinian cause” is still as important to his fellow Arabs as it once was. We’ll see if his assumption is correct or if, as I think, the Arab League vote against the Trump Plan was the last gasp of the Palestinian rejectionists and those they blackmailed – “do you want to be seen to care less for us than the Iranians?” – into supporting them.

If Abbas’s own people – those he holds in thrall and whose economic distress, which the Trump Plan would so greatly alleviate, is a matter of indifference to him – begin to read the Trump Plan online, some of them, realizing what a

fantastic deal they had in fact been offered, they will not be pleased with Abbas's hysterical rejection of a plan that convincingly promised the Palestinians much better lives. The Trump Plan has now set the standard for all future efforts at Middle East peacemaking. That Plan can't be cast aside, ignored, or forgotten by those who come after. They will have to take the plan, and all its careful detail, into account. It was, and remains, whatever the fanfaronade by Abbas in Cairo, a magnificent effort. It has changed everything.

First published in Jihad Watch [here](#).