



# ISRAEL MATTERS!

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## Trump Offers Two-State Peace Plan for Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Amid Skepticism

President Trump has unveiled his long-awaited Middle East peace plan that was hailed by Israel and ripped by Palestinian leaders.



Trump unveiled his plan at the White House alongside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, just weeks before the Israeli leader was set to compete in a contentious third round of national elections and the same day he became the country's first sitting prime minister to be formally

indicted. The announcement also came amid Trump's impeachment, briefly shifting the focus away from the seventh day of his trial in the Senate.

Shortly after the announcement, the Israeli government said it would vote on annexing 30 percent of the West Bank.

"My vision provides a win-win opportunity for both sides. A realistic two-state solution that resolves the risk of Palestinian statehood to Israel's security," Trump said in the East Room of the White House, standing next to Netanyahu. "Crucially, the proposed transition to a two-state solution will prevent no incremental security risk to the state of Israel."

The plan received mixed reviews on Capitol Hill, particularly among Democrats. Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said the White House offered lawmakers a two-page summary ahead of the plan's unveiling. "On the first read of these two pages, there appears to be a basis for negotiations," Pelosi said. "So let us be optimistic and hopeful and let us pray for peace."

After the full plan was released, at nearly 200 pages, several Senate Democrats slammed the proposal. White

House hopeful Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) ripped the administration's plan, arguing it offered no real future for a Palestinian state. She tweeted that Trump's proposal was a "rubber stamp" for future annexation of Palestinian-held territory by Israeli forces, adding that she would oppose any plan that, like Trump's, was not crafted with Palestinian negotiators at the table. "I will oppose unilateral annexation in any form—and reverse any policy that supports it," she tweeted.

Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) called Trump's proposal an "anti-peace plan," arguing it is "one-sided," to the detriment of Palestinians.

Trump's plan was immediately dismissed by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and no Palestinian representatives were present at the White House unveiling. Palestinians reportedly burned photos of Trump and Netanyahu in the West Bank and protests broke out in the Gaza Strip.

U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman said in a briefing with reporters that "Israel didn't have to wait at all" to begin annexing areas the plan designates for Israel.

Netanyahu referred to the U.S. plan as "recognizing Israel's sovereignty over all the Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria, large and small alike," using the biblical term to refer to the West Bank.

Detailed maps of the plan were tweeted out by Trump in English, Hebrew and Arabic, showing pockets of territory dotting the West Bank identified as land designated for a Palestinian state. It also included the Gaza Strip, and enclosed bubbles of land along Israel's border with Egypt in the Negev Desert.

The Associated Press reported that Jordan warned Israel against moving ahead with annexation and said that it is

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committed to the creation of a Palestinian state along the 1967 lines, which includes all of the West Bank and east Jerusalem.

The Trump plan offers a Palestinian capital in east Jerusalem with the promise of an American embassy, but also said that Israel would retain control over an “undivided” Jerusalem as its capital. The president said he expects Israel to continue working with Jordan to preserve the status quo over Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem’s old city.

Egypt offered muted support for Trump’s plan, urging Israelis and Palestinians to “carefully study” the plan, the AP reported.

Trump said the U.S. will give the Palestinians four years to achieve benchmarks in the plan — rejecting terrorism and violence against Israel, cleaning up government corruption and demilitarizing Hamas and Islamic Jihad — and engage with the plan, preserving territory designated for their state until then. “I sent a letter today to President Abbas,” Trump said in his remarks. “I explained to him that the territory allocated for his new state will remain open and undeveloped for a period of four years. During this time, Palestinians can use all appropriate deliberation to study the deal, negotiate with Israel, achieve the criteria for statehood and become a truly independent and wonderful state.”

Administration officials downplayed the lack of Palestinian participation in Tuesday’s ceremony. “It’s a big opportunity for the Palestinians,” senior White House adviser Jared Kushner, the lead architect of the peace plan, told CNN. “And, you know, they have a perfect track record of blowing every opportunity they’ve had in their past, but perhaps maybe their leadership will read the details of it, stop posturing and do what’s best to try to make the Palestinian people’s lives better.”

Netanyahu said he would agree to begin negotiations with the Palestinians “on the basis of [Trump’s] peace plan.”

The plan received the endorsement of Netanyahu’s chief political opponent, Benny Gantz, head of the Blue and White political party, but called for implementation after the March 2 elections and the formation of a stable government.

The event marked a culmination of sorts. Trump has promised throughout his three years in office that he would deliver a plan to foster peace between Israelis and Palestinians, but details had always been scarce and its release was repeatedly delayed.

Trump has repeatedly pointed to his administration’s support for Israel to bolster his foreign policy bonafides and

support among white evangelical voters. “As everyone knows, I have done a lot for Israel,” he said, citing the relocation of the U.S. embassy, recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights territory, and withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal.

“It is only reasonable that I have to do a lot for the Palestinians, or it just wouldn’t be fair,” he added.

[thehill.com]

## Palestinians Withdraw Request for UN Vote on US Mideast Plan

The Palestinians have abandoned their request for a vote at the UN Security Council on rejecting the US Mideast plan, over a lack of international support, diplomats said.

Introduced by Indonesia and Tunisia, the resolution risked not having nine out of 15 votes in its favor, the minimum required for adoption provided there is no veto by a permanent member, the diplomats told AFP.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas was set to take part in a session on President Donald Trump’s January 28 plan, which paves the way for Israeli annexation of much of the West Bank but also allows for a demilitarized Palestinian state.

The sudden Palestinian withdrawal of their request came after the United States -- which enjoys veto power as a permanent member -- proposed a series of amendments that could come for a vote at the session attended by Abbas.

In proposals, the United States would significantly alter the text to remove references to 1967 lines being the basis of peace. It would also cut out a line stating that Jewish settlements built in the West Bank since 1967 are illegal, a position taken by virtually every country except the US and Israel.

The United States is also seeking to eliminate language that equated East Jerusalem with the occupied West Bank.

The Trump plan calls for recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s undivided capital, while establishing a Palestinian capital on its outskirts.

While recognizing that the Trump plan “departs from the internationally endorsed terms of reference and parameters,” the US wants the resolution to state that the Security Council “welcomes discussion on this proposal to advance the cause of peace.”

“Discussions are continuing on the text,” a diplomat said on condition of anonymity.

[france24.com]