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To Broker Peace, the United States Must Understand Why Palestinians Reject Trump's 'Deal of the Century'

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Brief Analysis

In the past week since its announcement, there have effectively been no Palestinian voices coming out in favor of President Donald J. Trump's Israeli-Palestinian peace plan, announced on January 28, 2020 and dubbed as "The Deal of the Century," whether publicly or privately. Palestinian opinion is overwhelmingly against this latest plan to bring Israelis and Palestinians to the negotiating table. As such, the Trump Administration would benefit from taking seriously the issues that have been raised, focusing especially on why Palestinians have come out so decisively against this plan.

By emphasizing why Palestinians are responding the way that they are to this deal, I am hoping to demonstrate a path for adjusting the plan itself and the way it has been developed so that a similar U.S. proposal could actually promote peace. Yet understanding the failures of this current plan for Palestinians is only the first step; the realignment of the plan into an acceptable starting point is likely to require from all sides the emergence of courageous leaderships with good intentions towards the other and the will to effect change.

Unfortunately, this is an element that the current proposal lacks. What has been apparent throughout this process is that, while the plan has been in development for two years, Palestinians were hardly consulted regarding any of its details, leaving Palestinians feeling insulted and humiliated. Similarly, the number of Israelis in the loop compared to the Palestinians' lack of a role has been infuriating. President Trump made this apparent on Tuesday at the unveiling of the "Deal of the Century" in Washington.

Palestinians perceived the exclusive presence of Israeli and Jewish leaders along with a few Arab ambassadors, combined with the complete lack of Palestinian representation, as a call upon the Arab states to abandon the Palestinians and embrace Israel—not a call for mutual respect and negotiations. With the recent regional pivot to

focus on other issues, Palestinians are increasingly worried about the marginalization of their call for the end of the occupation and the establishment of a state throughout the [rest of the Arab world](#).

In fact, the Palestinian perception is that this deal has effectively been a negotiation between Israeli Jews and American Jews. The fact that Jared Kushner has been the public face of this negotiation effort along with its primary architect. Palestinians are generally dismissive of any objectivity on the part of Kushner, believing instead that Kushner holds great esteem and respect for the Israelis while having a deep contempt and dislike of Palestinians.

The second major issue—aside from a lack of Palestinian inclusion in the negotiations—is how the content of the deal demonstrates a lack of interest in engaging Palestinian concerns and perspectives. Instead of aiming for a win-win outcome emphasizing the benefits for both parties, the reality of the deal's initial parameters presented what Palestinians see as a humiliating defeat and a clear 'win' for Israelis, such that Palestinians feel that any form of accepting this deal would be capitulation and surrender—not a balanced, just and durable peace offer.

Indeed, the deal effectively denies Palestinians the right to end the occupation, statehood, independence, liberty, and national identity—conditioning Palestinian statehood instead on parameters defined by Israel rather than international law. The deal also contradicts many of the provisions in the [Arab Peace Initiative of 2002](#) as approved by the Arab League, a document that perhaps best represents the red-lines and points of compromise for Palestinians.

The question of recognition itself also falls prey to this unequal treatment. [The Palestinian Authority](#) has already recognized the right of the State of Israel to exist, and while the deal demands this of Hamas in order to begin negotiations, the plan states that it intends for mutual recognition while implicitly allowing for a number of conditions where Israel would be exempted from recognizing Palestinian statehood.

By limiting the opportunities for Palestinian statehood in this way, [the deal is in clear violation of international law and U. N. resolutions. It abrogates the 1993 Declaration of Principles and the 1994 Oslo Accords](#) (an agreement that was signed by both Palestinians, Israelis, and the United States), and its five permanent status issues framework [that prohibits unilateral annexation](#). The plan also implicitly posits a pathway away from the [two-state solution](#), which is the internationally accepted end to the current conflict.

On key issues of potential conflict, the deal also presents a framework that makes it difficult for any Palestinian to accept the plan as a whole. It explicitly bestows legitimacy and full Israeli sovereignty over the Holy City of Jerusalem as well as the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem in violation of its present international legal status.

[By sanctioning a united Jerusalem as the capital of Israel](#), this plan denies Palestinian Arab residents of Jerusalem of their historical aspirations and goes in the face of a general international consensus that Arab East Jerusalem is meant to be the future capital of the State of Palestine.

[Involving itself in major religious issues](#), the plan even deviates from the present status quo regarding the status of Muslim holy places in Jerusalem, particularly al-Haram al-Sharif, the third holiest site in Islam. [These holy sites are currently under the custodianship of the Jordanian authority Waqf religious trust](#), but the plan proposes that 'all religions' may pray at this site—a highly contentious departure from the current status quo. Palestinians fear that such a proposal will encourage Israelis to take over the site and destroy it in order to build their temple.

Aside from simply deciding in favor of Israeli aspirations on these key points of negotiation, [the deal's legitimization of Israel's persistent policies of illegal annexation and territorial expansion](#) in the occupied Palestinian territories makes the deal seem particularly one-sided in the eyes of Palestinians.

Despite what the deal claims about supporting Palestinians, in actuality this is not a deal designed to promote tendencies of moderation within the Palestinian community. Rather, the publicizing and promotion of such a one-

sided plan will serve to vindicate the radical ideology of a violent armed struggle because it suggests that the United States cannot be trusted as an honest broker. Sadly, this latest attempt at negotiations undermines the entire approach of negotiations and diplomacy in order to seek a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Alternatively, if Trump's 'Deal of the Century' was written in such a way to trigger immediate Palestinian rejection, then it has served its purpose. But if it was meant to inspire hope and bring peace, security, and prosperity, then a sense of balance is definitely needed. ❖



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