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# Arab Reactions to Trump's Peace Plan: An Analysis and Recommendation

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## Brief Analysis

On Tuesday, the Trump administration released the political portion of the long-awaited Middle East Peace Plan, six months after its attempts to publicly involve Arab states through the peace plan workshop in Manama, Bahrain, which introduced a \$50 billion Palestinian investment and infrastructure proposal. The eighty-page document named Jerusalem as the “unified capital of Israel” but also envisioned a new Palestinian demilitarized state in Gaza and around two-thirds of the West Bank. During his speech at the White House, President Trump thanked the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Bahrain, whose ambassadors attended the ceremony with Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, for supporting these peace efforts. Also notable, however, were those key officials not in attendance, including Palestinian and Jordanian officials, with both parties subsequently issuing quick rejections of the plan.

Indeed, Arab reactions so far are divided into three groups: qualified supporters, opponents, and silence. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and Morocco are among the supporters, though with various significant reservations; Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Tunisia, and Algeria are among the opponents. The Islamic State and militant groups such as Yemen’s Houthis are even attempting to mobilize Muslims all over the world to thwart the scheme. The silent group includes some of the North African states, with the significant and contrasting exceptions of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. The others, including Libya and Sudan, voiced a muted response if any, as they are currently experiencing major political transitions and economic difficulties.

These diverse responses reflect the current political climate in the Middle East and the severe political fragmentation among Arab states over crises in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen. Ever since the Arab Spring of 2011, the region has been characterized by civil wars, internal strife, and international interventions. Therefore, Arab support for the Palestinian cause has lost momentum and the issue is not at the top of the agenda for most Arab leaders, who are currently burdened with endless domestic issues and threats. Such conditions have significantly contributed to the current discrepancies in Arab discourse surrounding the Palestinian issue.

A key new yet hidden star in this constellation, however, is Iran. Those Arab states most afraid of Iran and desirous of American protection against it, namely the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), are the ones now expressing cautious support for the U.S. proposal. Conversely, those Arab states most subject to Iran's suzerainty already—Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen—are the ones most virulently opposed to the newly announced U.S. design.

The intra-Arab divisions help account for a curious and striking phenomenon: public Arab comment on the peace plan, whether in official statements or in the media, has mostly been a one-day wonder. The day of the plan's announcement, coverage and commentary were rife across the region. But by the next day, all this commentary was largely relegated to the sidelines except among the Palestinians themselves. This remarkably reticent Arab public discourse on Trump's peace plan suggests a heavy dose of avoidance of undue controversy or internal discord.

In this hypercautious vein, a possible preview of this weekend's Arab League emergency meeting on the subject came from its secretary-general, former [Egyptian foreign minister](#) Ahmed Abul Gheit. He criticized the plan as a unilateral initiative, asserting that a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians depends on the will of the two sides and not on the will of one party. He added that a first reading of President Trump's plan indicates a great loss of legitimate rights for Palestinians. However, the Arab League is "studying the American vision carefully," and "we are open to any serious effort made to achieve peace," he said.

## EGYPT, THE GCC, AND MOROCCO: QUALIFIED INTEREST

Yet notably, the [Egyptian official response](#) has been one of qualified support for the plan. The current Egyptian minister of foreign affairs issued a press release calling on both the Israelis and the Palestinians to study the U.S. vision carefully. The minister also called on the two parties to open channels for negotiations with the United States as a mediator in order to reach a comprehensive and fair peace agreement that meets the aspirations of the two peoples and leads to an independent Palestinian state.

Similarly, the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs [voiced its appreciation](#) of the Trump administration's efforts to develop a comprehensive peace plan. The statement also called upon both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides to engage in direct negotiations, discuss the plan, and reach compromises over points of disagreements in the plan. However, the statement underscored the previous efforts exerted by the kingdom, including the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002. In the same vein, and according to Channel 13 news and the Palestine News Agency, Saudi King Salman also called Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas directly, telling him, "Your issue is ours and the issue of all Arabs and Muslims, and we are with you."

Yet notably, the Jeddah-based [Saudi Gazette](#) also featured a statement from the [Arab Council for Regional Integration](#)—an independent entity that promotes dialogue between Arabs and Israelis—in response to the Trump plan and the subsequent popular protests in some parts of the Arab world. The article emphasized that the statement called for "dialogue and engagement among all parties to our region's conflicts—whether between Israelis and their many neighbors, or among neighbors in a given town who differ in sect, ethnicity, or ideology." A Saudi newspaper's inclusion of this perspective provides further signs that the Saudi leadership is open to the renewed U.S. attempts to broker a peace deal.

As for the UAE, it welcomed Trump's plan, and its ambassador to Washington, Yousef Al Otaiba—who was also present at Trump's unveiling of the plan—[said in a statement on Twitter](#), "The United Arab Emirates appreciates the continued efforts made by the United States to reach a Palestinian-Israeli peace agreement." Otaiba added, "The UAE believes that both the Palestinians and the Israelis can achieve lasting peace and genuine coexistence with the support of the international community."

Like Otaiba, the Bahraini ambassador to the United States attended Trump's peace press conference, suggesting the

country's endorsement of the plan. This sense was confirmed in a [recent statement by the Bahraini Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)—to paraphrase, the statement praised the Trump administration's efforts to achieve a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue, which would ultimately lead to the restoration of Palestinian rights and the establishment of an independent state. It also applauded the U.S. efforts to advance the peace process.

In the case of two other Gulf states—Kuwait and Qatar—the statements issued by their foreign ministries praised the attempt while emphasizing the need to adhere to the 1967 borders. The [Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) announced that it highly appreciates the efforts of the United States to resolve the Palestinian issue and end the Arab-Israeli conflict that has spanned more than seventy years. The statement characterized the conflict as a cause of the suffering of the Palestinian people, and an issue that has demolished the security and stability of the region. However, the ministry also reaffirmed that a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue can only be achieved by adhering to the relevant international resolutions, which affirmed the establishment of an independent and sovereign state within the borders of June 4, 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Qatar's comments on Trump's plan can be described as even more mixed. The [Qatari Foreign Ministry issued a press release](#) praising the efforts exerted by all parties toward the achievement of an enduring and just peace, expressed its appreciation to the Trump administration for its endeavors to find a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and called on all concerned parties to engage in direct negotiations. The statement also asserted that all solutions must be "consistent with international law and relevant UN resolutions." However, unlike Saudi Arabia and Egypt, Qatar called for a Palestinian state "within the 1967 borders, including East Jerusalem." The statement also emphasized the need for the inclusion of Palestinian right of return for pre-1948 lands—a demand that explicitly undermines key points in the proposed peace plan.

At the same time, Qatar's state-funded Al Jazeera television network offered a stream of highly negative commentary in its typical style. Among other guests, it featured [Jordan's former minister of foreign affairs Marwan Muasher saying](#) that "Israel and the United States do not want a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, and Israel does not want the Palestinian majority to remain in the territories it controls." He added that "the main intention of Israel is to create the necessary circumstances to displace the Palestinians from the West Bank and ask Jordan to manage those areas." Other commentary on this channel is even more vitriolic, with a characteristically Islamist/Hamas/Muslim Brotherhood slant.

Finally, Morocco stood out as the one North African state that commented favorably on the plan with a [statement issued by its Foreign Ministry](#). The statement maintained that Morocco will thoroughly study the plan's details and expressed appreciation for Washington's effort. Moreover, Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita noted, "We call for constructive dialogue in order to establish peace."

## PALESTINIAN REJECTIONISM

**A**s for the opposing camp, the Palestinians were the first in line. Immediately after President Trump revealed his plan, [President Abbas vehemently rejected it](#), commenting that the proposal "will not pass and will go to the dustbin of history." He also rejected Trump's statement that Jerusalem would remain the "undivided capital of Israel," maintaining that the city is not for sale or up for bargaining. Abbas also threatened to take measures to end the "functional role" of the [Palestinian Authority](#). And he formally requested an extraordinary session of the Arab League at the ministerial level in order to discuss ways to confront the so-called "[Deal of the Century](#)."

The Hamas movement, which controls the Gaza Strip, similarly announced its rejection of Trump's plan, [declaring in a statement](#) that it will not accept a substitute for Jerusalem as the capital of the state of Palestine. Hamas vice president Khalil al-Hayya also declared that the movement would not accept any prejudice to the right of return.

[The Palestinian News Net](#) maintained that both Trump and Netanyahu badly needed to announce the deal for purely

domestic political reasons. For Trump, who is currently facing an impeachment that may hurt his chances in the November elections, the plan could help overcome those obstacles. Similarly, it suggested that Netanyahu is desperate to announce the plan to help him win the upcoming Israeli election and prevent his impending trial on charges of corruption. Furthermore, the article suggested that Netanyahu is also concerned that if Trump loses reelection, it would deprive Israel of a historic opportunity that occurs but once in a lifetime.

The Palestinian rejection of the plan did not come as a surprise, since the Palestinians have refused numerous peace initiatives in the past as not meeting the needs of their people. In addition, it would be difficult for Palestinians to come together given the deep internal divisions within their society, in which different groups use different versions of “struggle.” Therefore, the easiest option is to reject the plan. The Palestinians also feel that many Arab countries, including Egypt and the Gulf states, have all but deserted them. These events have widened the gap of mistrust between the Palestinians and much of the Arab world, pushing them to reject any settlement imposed by the United States and the Arab states that support the peace deal.

## NEIGHBORING JORDAN ON THE FENCE

**W**hile not opposing the U.S. plan outright, Jordan insists on maintaining certain previous conditions for any new peace deal with Israel. Two days before the plan’s release, Jordan’s King Abdullah showed up on [Almamlaka TV](#) and commented on the U.S. deal: “Our position is perfectly well-known. We will not agree to proposals that come at our expense.”

At a much lower level of protocol, Jordanian House Speaker [Atef Tarawneh](#) described Trump’s initiative as “sinister, and a black day for the Palestinian cause that reminds us of the Balfour Declaration.” He [added that the peace treaty](#) between Israel and Jordan is at stake, and “we must address the United Nations and the international community and work to expose the Israeli violations.” The Jordanian Foreign Ministry also released a statement demanding the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on June 4, 1967, lines with East Jerusalem as its capital, noting that fulfillment of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians can be only attained through a two-state solution.

In a separate statement, [Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi declared](#) that King Abdullah’s position on the Palestinian cause is unwavering, and called for initiating direct negotiations to solve all final-status issues in accordance with established terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative, and international law. Jordanian media has also fiercely criticized the plan. For instance, the newspaper [al-Rai](#) commented that Trump has totally disregarded all European, American, and UN initiatives, and that he approaches the region with the mentality of a “trader.” Therefore, Arab states should collectively reject the plan, which does not fulfill the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Jordan’s reservations about Trump’s proposals emanate from its fear that the plan will force the kingdom to serve as a home for more Palestinian refugees and disturb its demographic balance, ultimately transforming it into a Palestinian state. Jordan also fears that Israel may proceed with Trump’s plan and annex the Jordan Valley and various settlements assigned under the plan, thereby severing the kingdom from the West Bank.

## DISTANT ALGERIA AND TUNISIA IN OPPOSITION

**N**o such concerns motivate distant Algeria, but it has long been a vocal bastion of radical Arab nationalist rhetoric. Algiers thus also [confirmed its rejection of the deal](#), noting its continuous support for the Palestinian cause. The Foreign Ministry drew attention to the importance of consolidating Palestinian ranks, and called for coordinating joint Arab and international action to overcome this deal.

Although Tunisia’s president and Foreign Ministry did not comment, its parliament issued a statement fiercely attacking Trump’s plan, describing it as “racist” and “shameful.” The [statement](#) called on Arab, international, and Islamic parties that support Palestinian rights to condemn this hostile behavior. It also called on Tunisia’s Foreign

Ministry and all of the country's civil forces to unify their efforts to end the U.S. "scheme," which in its view aims to legitimize occupation, injustice, and the theft of Palestinian land and rights. Finally, the parliament called on the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to make a unified decision on preventing the plan's implementation.

## THE IRANIAN-INFLUENCED CAMP AND THE ISLAMIC STATE

Iraq, which currently suffers from Iranian political and economic dominance, has rejected the plan. In a [press statement](#), the first vice-speaker of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, Hassan Karim al-Kaabi, charged that "announcement of the peace deal at this suspicious time would lead to a new escalation and the collapse of all indicators of peace and security in the region." Even the head of the comparatively moderate [National Wisdom Movement, Ammar al-Hakim](#), called on the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Arab League, and UN Security Council and General Assembly to take "a historical position" regarding the deal. He added that "Jerusalem was and...will remain our human, Islamic, and Arab cause, and it cannot be confiscated, monopolized, or sold in the markets of electoral bids under any pretext. Therefore, those who conspired to liquidate the Palestinian cause must be aware that one who can never give up his dignity cannot give up his identity as well."

Because Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria remain partly under the control of Iran—and given Tehran's history of manipulating the Palestinian cause to promote its own expansionist ambitions and regional hegemony—the official rejection of Trump's deal by all three is hardly surprising. For Iran, any potential solution to the conflict would discredit its message of "resistance" and deprive it of an important instrument of influence in the region.

Armed militia and extremist movements also took the opportunity to comment on the plan. In Yemen, Mohammed Ali al-Houthi—spokesperson for the Zaidi Shia Muslim movement known as Ansar Allah, or the Houthis—vehemently criticized the deal and described it as an "illusion that will not change the reality of Arab and Islamic awareness of the centrality of the Palestinian cause." This same awareness, he argued, also supports the Houthi militia's efforts [in Yemen](#).

Meanwhile, a day before Trump's announcement, [Islamic State spokesperson](#) Abu Hamza al-Qurayshi attacked the imminent plan in a thirty-seven-minute audio message. He called on "Muslims in Palestine and all countries" to be "a spearhead in the war against the Jews and in thwarting their plans and their deal of the century." He also criticized Iran and Hamas.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In all likelihood, the Trump administration does not intend to impose its plan on Arab states. It is just a proposal, and therefore subject to negotiation and compromise. As such, outright rejections of the plan will lead to nothing but perpetual stalemate. This is all the more true given the current environment of deep intra-Arab divisions, which rule out any effective alternative approach.

So in the upcoming Arab League emergency meeting scheduled for February 1, the Arab states should not waste their time criticizing and condemning the plan. They should instead work together to coordinate with both the U.S. and Israeli sides, discuss the many points of disagreement precisely in order to reach a compromise, and ultimately put an end to this ceaseless conflict. ❖



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