

# A CLOSER LOOK

ANALYZING THE NEWS THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

## The Trump Peace Plan Is Coming

WHAT WILL IT MEAN?

**J**ared Kushner, President Trump’s son-in-law and senior adviser, has almost entirely avoided interviews with the American media, to the point that for over a year it was a bit of a mystery what his voice sounds like. So it was a surprise last week when he gave an interview not to a friendly media outlet back home but to the Palestinian paper *Al-Quds*.

The interview, in which Kushner heavily criticized Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, was likely also an indication of how serious the Trump administration is about an upcoming push for an Israeli-Palestinian peace plan, which Kushner is spearheading. What’s in the plan isn’t clear yet, but curiosity is rising, even as expectations for forward movement on peace remain extremely low.

The White House has so far been extremely generous to Israel, not just by moving the US embassy to Jerusalem but also by repeatedly defending Israel in international venues, including by exiting the UN Human Rights Council because of its prejudiced focus on Israel.

But will a peace plan favor Israel? President Trump suggested, after announcing the embassy move, that Israel would have to give up something comparable in exchange. Does that bode ill?

### The Interview

In his interview with *Al-Quds*, Jared Kushner gave an upbeat and

optimistic view of the possibility of a peace plan, opined that the Palestinian populace is more amenable to peace than is commonly assumed, and laid blame for the political stalemate on the Palestinian leadership, also throwing cold water on PA President Mahmoud Abbas’ ability to make a deal: “I do question how much President Abbas has the ability to, or is willing to, lean into finishing a deal. He has his talking points, which have not changed in the last 25 years.”

To some observers, Kushner comes off as overly optimistic. That includes former Obama administration officials Philip Gordon and Prem Kumar, who wrote in *The Atlantic* that an appeal to the Palestinian people is likely to be disappointing, and that Mahmoud Abbas and his advisers don’t believe that they can sell any compromise to the Palestinian public. “In fact,” Gordon and Kumar write, “more Palestinians now oppose a two-state solution than support one, and a majority—57 percent—say that such a solution is no longer practical because of Israeli settlement expansion, which now extends deep into the West Bank. Over 35 percent of Palestinians now support a one-state solution—in other words, a single country with an Arab majority and equal rights for all—a solution increasingly appealing to Palestinians under the age of 30.”

Dr. Michael Kopolow, the policy director at the centrist Israel Policy Forum, said that the idea of appealing directly to the Palestinian public is unlikely to work well. “Speaking directly to the Palestinian people is important and could in theory work to create



pressure on a reluctant leadership, but only if the Trump administration is offering something that would be attractive to ordinary Palestinians and only if the administration had a built-up store of credibility with ordinary Palestinians.

“I don’t think that either of these factors is present, given reporting that the peace plan tilts toward the Israeli side and in the aftermath of Trump’s Jerusalem decision, which was unpopular, to say the least, with Palestinians. Abbas is deeply unpopular among Palestinians for his authoritarianism and the PA’s general corruption, but if there is anyone who is even less popular, it is Trump.”

Israeli analysts with a right-wing perspective also see the idea as impracticable. “They’re quite serious about getting a peace plan through,” Prof. Efraim Inbar, president of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies, told *Ami*. “But it’s quite naïve. I don’t believe the Palestinians will accept it.”

### **The Plan**

According to Prof. Inbar, what has been leaked so far about the plan seems to favor the Israelis. That includes Abu Dis being made the capital of a Palestinian state, the Holy Basin (the Old City and adjacent areas) being left in Israeli hands, and the Jordan Valley remaining under Israeli military control. Israel would give up some neighborhoods in East Jerusalem under the plan. This, he said, conforms with the idea, mentioned by Prime Minister Netanyahu, of a “state minus,” rather than a full two-state solution.

Dr. Koplow told *Ami* that these elements suggest a misunderstanding on the part of the administration: “Some things that the administration may perceive as a gift to the Palestinians and a burden for the Israelis will not be seen by Palestinians as such. For instance, the leaked report that Israel will be asked to withdraw from four Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem will be hotly contested by Israel since it will destroy the concept of an eternally unified Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel, yet the Palestinians will not see this as a real concession by any means, as it will only be a fraction of the Palestinian neighborhoods of the city that were not part of the Jerusalem municipality before Israel annexed them.”

The plan will also reportedly involve direct US support for humanitarian efforts in Gaza that don’t go through UNRWA. To Dr. Kobi Michael, a senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies, this is a positive sign: “The American administration has decided to acknowledge the reality: UNRWA is a cause of the perpetuation of the conflict.”

He similarly interpreted the news, just this week, that the US had frozen aid payments to organizations that deal with the West Bank and Gaza, apparently due to the Taylor Force Act, which requires such a freeze to any funds that directly assist the PA until the Secretary of State confirms that they aren’t paying terrorists or their families for attacks on Israelis.

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**DR. MICHAEL KOPLOW**



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**They're quite serious about getting a peace plan through.**

**DR. KOPLOW**

to deal with them, he will lose more," Dr. Michael said.

But to Dr. Koplow, the move seemed bizarre. "Kushner and Greenblatt have been traveling around the region in an effort to get Arab states to increase their humanitarian aid to Gaza in an effort to stabilize it at precisely the same time that the Trump administration has frozen entirely every penny it spends in the West Bank and Gaza, which beggars belief in its audacity. The freeze also includes the security assistance that the US provides to the PA security forces in order to train them and to promote their continued coordination with Israel, and putting that program at risk is foolhardy when trying to create the conditions for negotiations and greater trust between the two sides.

"None of this makes any sense when the US is trying to maintain whatever leverage it has left, since removing its financial stake from the West Bank and Gaza entirely basically means that there is nothing left, given the enormous distrust that the Palestinians have for the White House."

**Will the Neighbors Make a Difference?**

Part of the US plan appears to involve leveraging its relationships with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan to put pressure on the Palestinians to come to the table. Dr. Michael said that while King Abdullah of Jordan has been showing some reluctance, due to the strong Palestinian constituency in Jordan and his own concerns about Jordanian stewardship of the Muslim sites in the Old City of Jerusalem, there are reasons to think that the Arab countries will indeed push.

"The Saudi position is interesting. They are the greatest supporters of the American administration. And Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman has said publicly: 'What is the problem with Abu Dis being the Palestinian capital?'"

Dr. Michael said that the crown prince has come to believe that the Palestinians are a real burden in the fight to oppose Iran's attempt at hegemony in the Middle East.

But other experts were more skeptical about whether these countries would really get involved. Prof. Inbar said, "It's not clear to what extent they can come onboard," that is, without angering their polupaces.

And Dr. Koplow suggested that their leverage is not as great as the administration may be expecting. "The problems are that those countries only have limited leverage over Abbas outside of threatening to support his bitter enemy and arch-rival Mohammed Dahlan, that they themselves are not willing to stick their own necks out too far in carrying the Trump administration's water, and that they have all publicly set redlines—1967 borders with swaps and a capital in East Jerusalem—that the Trump team has not approached endorsing."

Kushner, special envoy Jason Greenblatt and Ambassador to Israel David Friedman have all been meeting with the Israeli prime minister and other Israeli officials to discuss the peace plan and the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Whether something truly revolutionary or another failed attempt at peace will emerge will likely be seen within the next few weeks. ●