



BRIEFING PAPER

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Annexation of the West Bank

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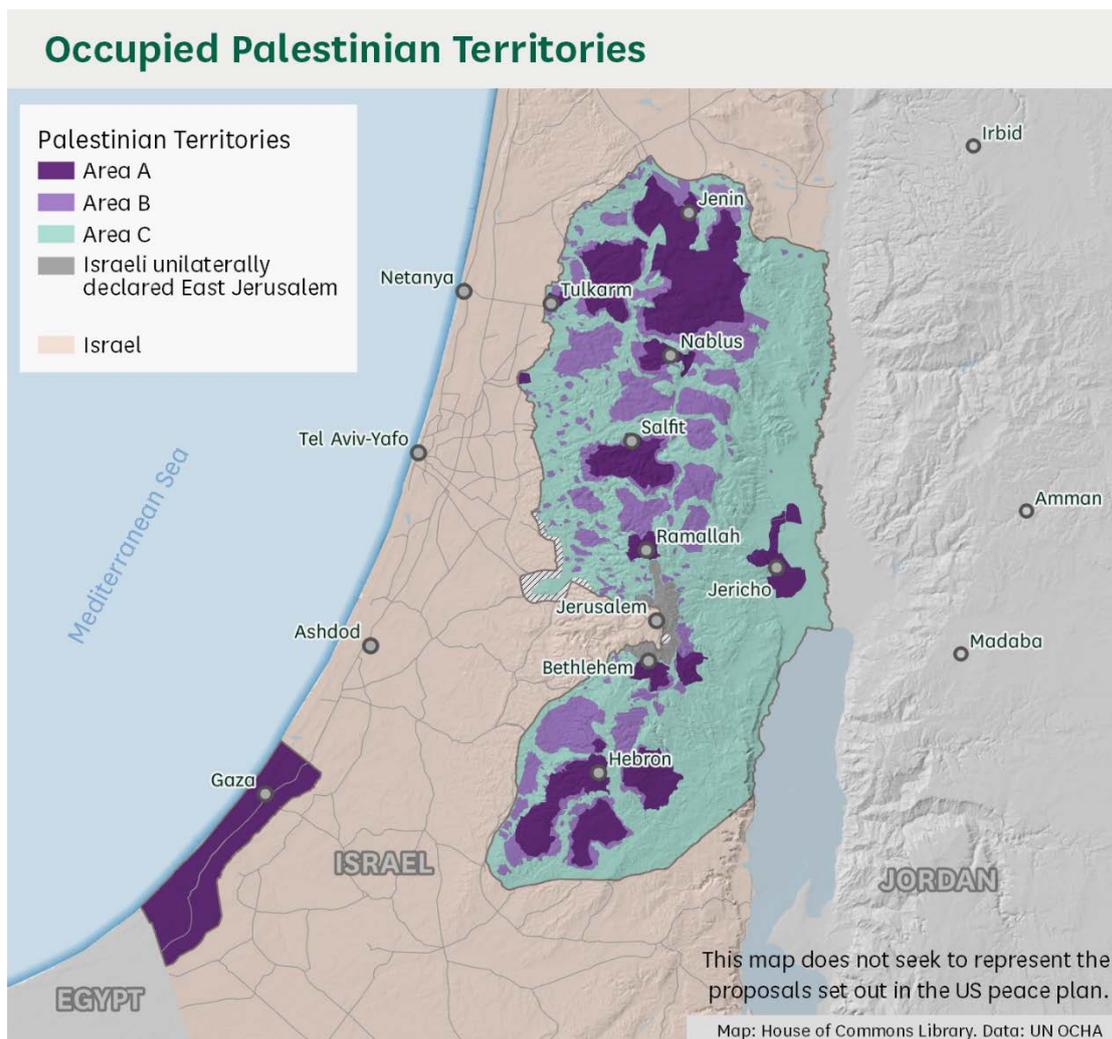
On 28 January 2020, the Trump Administration published its [peace plan for the Middle East](#). Among its more controversial proposals is a land swap between Israel and the Palestinians. This would require Israel to annex land currently occupied by settlements in the West Bank.

The Israeli Government plans to begin discussions in the Cabinet from 1 July. The annexation itself would have profound diplomatic, security and economic repercussions for both Israel and the Palestinians.

The proposed annexation

Israel has occupied the West Bank and Gaza since 1967. Those territories are collectively known as the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). Before the 1967 war, the West Bank was part of Jordan whilst Gaza was part of Egypt.

After 1967, Israelis began to move into purpose-built settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. In the mid-1990s Israel divided the West Bank into Areas A, B and C when the Palestinian Authority (PA) was created. Areas A and B are largely under PA control. Area C—by far the largest — remains under Israeli control and is where most Jewish settlements are located.



Over 600,000 Israelis now live in settlements in the West Bank. The US peace plan would give Israel sovereignty over the settlements there as well as land in the Jordan Valley. The area amounts to approximately 30 percent of the West Bank.

In return, the Palestinians will gain territory elsewhere; mainly in the desert along the border with Egypt. Areas that don't share a border would be connected by roads, bridges and tunnels. But the new Palestinian territory must remain undeveloped for four years to give the Palestinians time to meet several conditions. These include the disarmament of militant groups, the renunciation of violence and the recognition of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people.

President Trump suggested the plan would “[more than double](#)” the land under Palestinian control. The Palestine Liberation Organisation has said the new US plan would give Palestinians control over only 15 percent of what it called “[historic Palestine](#).”

In the Negev Desert, [Israeli settlers have said](#) the plan offers land without people to people who do not want the land.

While discussions are due to begin on 1 July, there is no stated deadline for the annexation.

Israeli politics

The proposed annexation takes place during a period of turmoil in Israeli politics, with three inconclusive general elections in less than a year.

The current power-sharing means two party leaders – Benjamin Netanyahu and Benny Gantz - will take turns to be Prime Minister. At the same time the [trial of the current Prime Minister](#) Benjamin Netanyahu on corruption charges started on 24 May.

Mr Netanyahu is reported to be still planning to press ahead with plans to annex the proposed land, which the [BBC suggested was](#) “a move certain to infuriate the Palestinians.”

Benny Gantz, currently Defence Minister, has [ordered the military to start preparing](#) for the annexation.

Palestinian views

The Palestinian Authority (PA) [rejected the US peace plan](#) before it was published. Similarly, Hamas officials in Gaza opposed the plan. On 20 May, the PA [declared an end to cooperation with Israel](#)—having previously cut off communications with the Trump Administration after it moved its embassy to Jerusalem in 2017. PA President Mahmud Abbas said:

The Palestine Liberation Organisation and the State of Palestine are today no longer bound by all agreements and understandings with the American and Israeli governments, and by all the commitments derived from those understandings and agreements, including those relating to security.

Palestinian academic, Mohammed S. Dajani, has argued the [PA should put forward its alternative vision](#) for the two-state solution. The wider Palestinian belief is that if they accept the plan there is [no chance it would lead to the end of Israeli military rule](#) or to the establishment of a viable Palestinian state.

Current discussions on annexation come at a time when the OPTs are tackling the coronavirus pandemic and the economy is contracting. It is reported that the PA decision to end cooperation with Israel has [significantly impacted](#) the exit of Palestinians from Gaza, including for medical reasons.

Response from the international community

[Regional responses](#) have been mixed. The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman all attended the launch of the peace plan. Saudi Arabia and Egypt have offered a qualified welcome to the proposals. Iran and Turkey have condemned the proposals outright, calling them a betrayal of the Palestinian people.

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In May it was reported that: “the Arab League, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United Nations, and the European Union have all [condemned this annexation](#).”

The [EU’s official position](#) is that a two-state solution based on pre-1967 borders is the only viable option for lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. That solution must be in line with UN resolutions and international law. In May the EU foreign affairs representative, Josep Borrell, said the EU [opposed any unilateral action](#) being taken with regard to the West Bank and that the EU would discourage this.

The majority of the international community considers Israeli settlements illegal under international law.

On 20 May, Nickolay Mladenov, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process said:

The continuing threat of annexation by Israel of parts of the West Bank would constitute a most serious violation of international law, deal a devastating blow to the two-state solution, close the door to a renewal of negotiations.

He [called on Israel to abandon the threat of annexation](#) and for the Palestinian leadership to re-engage with the Middle East Quartet (comprised of US, Russia, the EU and the UN).

The UK Government position

The Government continues to oppose unilateral annexation but is in favour of US peace efforts.

On 28 January, [Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab released a statement](#) welcoming the US proposal for peace between Israelis and Palestinians as “a serious proposal, reflecting extensive time and effort.”

Labour MP [Wes Streeting noted](#) that a peace plan without Palestinian participation was “not a peace plan — it is an annexation plan.” Conservative MP [Mr Hollobone](#) said that the plan was “a set of serious and constructive proposals that deserves more than instant rejection”.

Although the Government has publicly supported the US in its efforts, it has not changed its position on several issues it considers essential for the resolution of the conflict. These are:

- a safe and secure Israeli state
- a viable Palestinian state based on 1967 borders
- Jerusalem as a shared capital of both states
- A just and fair settlement for refugees

It is arguable that this position is at odds with some of the proposals set out in the US peace plan.

In May 2020, the Government [reiterated its opposition to annexation](#) of parts of the West Bank:

We are concerned by reports that the new Israeli Government coalition has reached an agreement which may pave the way for annexation of parts of the West Bank. The UK position is clear: any unilateral moves towards annexation of parts of the West Bank by Israel would be damaging to efforts to restart peace negotiations and contrary to international law.

Further reading

[Peace to prosperity: a vision to improve the lives of the Palestinian and Israeli people, *US Administration*.](#)

[Trump's peace plan aims to make occupation permanent, *Khaled Eligny*.](#)

[Palestinian statehood, *House of Commons Library*, August 2011.](#)

[The OPTs: recent developments, *House of Commons Library*, March 2017](#)

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