



Israel-Palestine: The New US Peace Deal Debate on 27 February 2020

On 27 February 2020, the House of Lords is due to debate a motion moved by Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) that “this House takes note of the United States’ proposals for peace between Israelis and Palestinians, announced on 28 January”.

Summary

The Trump administration launched its plan to bring peace to Israel and Palestine on 28 January 2020. Speaking alongside Israel’s Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, President Trump claimed his proposals could ensure a lasting settlement that would bring peace, security and prosperity to both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. Prime Minister Netanyahu welcomed the deal as did his main political rival in Israel, Benny Gantz. However, the Palestinians have rejected the deal. Palestine later broke off all contact with the American and Israeli administrations in protest.

The deal proposes a ‘two-state’ solution aimed at creating viable states of Israel and Palestine. However, observers have questioned this characterisation on several grounds. These include the potential nature of sovereignty that would be afforded to the Palestinians, the control and future of Jerusalem, and other issues long central to the peace process, such as the ‘right of return’ of Palestinian refugees. Territorially, the deal proposes to grant Israeli sovereignty over controversial Israeli settlements in the West Bank as well as land in the Jordan Valley. In return, the Trump administration has proposed an expansion of Palestinian territory elsewhere, notably in the desert region east of the Gaza Strip, as part of a controversial programme of ‘land swaps’ between the two peoples. This Palestinian territory would remain undeveloped for four years to give the Palestinian side time to negotiate and to meet several conditions to acquire a form of sovereignty over the areas it would administer. These conditions include the disarmament of militant groups like Hamas, the renunciation of violence and the recognition of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people.

International reaction to the proposals has been mixed. Representatives of the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman all attended President Trump’s launch of the peace plan with Israeli officials. Others such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt have offered a qualified welcome to the proposals, welcoming US efforts and expressing hope they will provide a basis for negotiation. However, other regional actors such as Iran and Turkey have condemned the proposals outright, calling them a betrayal of the Palestinian people. The UK Government has been receptive to the plan, with the Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, welcoming the initiative as a way of getting both sides around the negotiating table.

James Tobin | 13 February 2020

A full list of Lords Library briefings is available on the research briefings page on the internet. The Library publishes briefings for all major items of business debated in the House of Lords. The Library also publishes briefings on the House of Lords itself and other subjects that may be of interest to Members. Library briefings are compiled for the benefit of Members of the House of Lords and their personal staff, to provide impartial, authoritative, politically balanced briefing on subjects likely to be of interest to Members of the Lords. Authors are available to discuss the contents of the briefings with the Members and their staff but cannot advise members of the general public.

Any comments on Library briefings should be sent to the Head of Research Services, House of Lords Library, London SW1A 0PW or emailed to purvism@parliament.uk.

I. From ‘Peace to Prosperity’: The New US Peace Deal

On 28 January 2020, the President of the United States, Donald Trump, unveiled his long-promised plan to bring peace to the Middle East and “achieve peace, security, dignity and opportunity for Israel and the Palestinian people”.¹ The President was joined at the launch of the proposals by Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Mr Netanyahu’s main political rival in Israel, Benny Gantz. However, there was no representative from the Palestinian Authority. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas reportedly refused to discuss the deal or consider a draft. He wanted to leave no doubt as to the Palestinians’ rejection of the proposals and the way they were devised.²

In summary, the key proposals contained in the plan are as follows:

- **A ‘Two-State Solution’:** The plan proposes the creation of a future Palestinian State, with mutual recognition of the State of Israel and State of Palestine with “equal rights for all citizens within each state”.³ However, observers have questioned this characterisation on several grounds. These include the potential nature of sovereignty that would be afforded to the Palestinians, the control and future of Jerusalem, and other issues which have long been central to the peace process such as the ‘right of return’ of Palestinian refugees.
- **Borders/Settlements:** The plan proposes that Israel would acquire sovereignty over approximately 30 percent of the West Bank, according to analysis from the US Congressional Research Service.⁴ This would include Israeli settlements in the area and the majority of the Jordan Valley. The plan also proposes an expansion of Palestinian territory. President Trump suggested the plan would “more than double” the land under Palestinian control.⁵ Conceptual maps included in the plan (see figures 2 and 3 of this briefing) suggest much of this land would be desert near Gaza and further that the expansion of Palestinian territories would be at least partly achieved through controversial ‘land swaps’.⁶ This new territory would include areas the Palestinian Authority currently administers, and additional land acquired through compensatory swaps, with non-contiguous areas connected by roads, bridges and tunnels.⁷ The Palestine Liberation Organisation has said the new US plan would give Palestinians control over 15 percent of what it called “historic Palestine”.⁸
- **Jerusalem/Holy Sites:** The plan would grant Israel sovereignty over nearly all of Jerusalem, with the city “remaining Israel’s undivided capital”.⁹ The Palestinians would be

¹ White House, ‘[President Donald J. Trump’s Vision for Peace, Prosperity, and a Brighter Future for Israel and the Palestinian People](#)’, 28 January 2020.

² *Guardian*, ‘[Palestinians Cut Ties with Israel and US After Rejecting Trump Peace Plan](#)’, 1 February 2020.

³ White House, [Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People](#), January 2020, p 12.

⁴ Congressional Research Service, [Israel and the Palestinians: U.S. Peace Plan and Possible Israeli Annexation](#), 30 January 2020, p 1.

⁵ *Financial Times* (£), ‘[Donald Trump Pleases Israel With Long-awaited Middle East Peace Plan](#)’, 28 January 2020.

⁶ *Times of Israel*, ‘[Trump Peace Plan Offers Land Without People to People Who Don’t Want the Land](#)’, 5 February 2020.

⁷ Congressional Research Service, [Israel and the Palestinians: U.S. Peace Plan and Possible Israeli Annexation](#), 30 January 2020, p 1.

⁸ BBC News, ‘[Trump Middle East Plan: Palestinians Reject ‘Conspiracy’](#)’, 29 January 2020.

⁹ White House, [Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People](#), January 2020, p 21. This follows the US administration’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s official capital in December 2017. The UK Government has not endorsed this decision, and the UK embassy in the country remains in Tel Aviv.

able to obtain some areas of East Jerusalem located in “all areas east and north of the existing security barrier”, including Kafr Aqab, the eastern part of Shuafat and Abu Dis. This could subsequently “be named Al Quds or another name as determined by the State of Palestine”.¹⁰ According to the US Ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, the status quo of prohibiting non-Muslim worship on the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif would continue, along with Jordan’s custodial role with regard to Muslim holy sites.¹¹

- **Security:** Under the terms of the plan, Israel would retain security control over the entire West Bank and the Palestinians would be permitted no standing army.¹² The plan provides for the potential for Palestinians to assume more control over the territories they administer, but only if they meet a number of conditions including the disarming of militant groups like Hamas and the renunciation of violence.¹³
- **Palestinian Statehood/Sovereignty:** The plan provides for the Palestinian authorities to acquire a “form of sovereignty” over the territory created, but only achieve statehood should the Palestinian Authority and Palestine Liberation Organisation meet a number of specified criteria.¹⁴ As well as the security conditions, this would include the ending of certain international activities and recognising Israel as the “nation state of the Jewish people”.¹⁵ Under the terms of the plan, territory allocated to the Palestinians would remain undeveloped for four years, during which time the Palestinian authorities can study the deal, negotiate with Israel and meet these criteria for statehood.¹⁶
- **Refugees/the ‘Right of Return’:** The plan provides for Palestinian refugee claims to be satisfied through internationally-funded compensation and resettlement outside of Israel in the West Bank, Gaza and third-party states.¹⁷ This is in contradiction with Palestinian calls for the ‘right of return’, whereby those expelled by Jewish forces from what became Israel in the 1948–49 war, and their descendants, could go back to their former homes.¹⁸ However, the right of return has been criticised as a symbolic gesture that is detrimental to the peace process. Israel argues such a move would overwhelm it demographically and lead to its effective end as a Jewish state.¹⁹
- **Funding and Investment:** The plan incorporates economic commitments set out in the *Peace to Prosperity Economic Plan* released in July 2019.²⁰ The White House has stated these proposals amount to an investment of \$50 billion (US) in the region over a ten year period.²¹ The *New York Times* observes that the plan envisions a variety of funding sources, like grants and private equity, and the “bulk of the money is set to come from countries in

¹⁰ White House, [Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People](#), January 2020, p 21.

¹¹ Congressional Research Service, [Israel and the Palestinians: U.S. Peace Plan and Possible Israeli Annexation](#), 30 January 2020, p 1.

¹² *New York Times* (£), [‘Trump Releases Mideast Peace Plan That Strongly Favour’s Israel’](#), 4 February 2020

¹³ Congressional Research Service, [Israel and the Palestinians: U.S. Peace Plan and Possible Israeli Annexation](#), 30 January 2020, p 1.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ BBC News, [‘Trump Middle East Plan: Palestinians Reject ‘Conspiracy’](#), 29 January 2020.

¹⁷ Congressional Research Service, [Israel and the Palestinians: U.S. Peace Plan and Possible Israeli Annexation](#), 30 January 2020, p 1.

¹⁸ BBC News, [‘Trump Middle East Plan: Palestinians Reject ‘Conspiracy’](#), 29 January 2020.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ White House, [Peace to Prosperity: The Economic Plan: A New Vision for the Palestinian People](#), 22 July 2019.

²¹ White House, [‘President Donald J. Trump’s Vision for Peace, Prosperity, and a Brighter Future for Israel and the Palestinian People’](#), 28 January 2020.

the Persian Gulf’.²²

2. Current Landscape of Israel and Palestine

The US peace plan provides illustrations of how a future State of Israel and State of Palestine might look (these illustrations are reproduced in figures 2 and 3 of this briefing).

Figure 1 shows a UN map of the current landscape of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories for comparison. The diagram illustrates the regions occupied by the Palestinian people including the Oslo ‘zones’ A, B and C. These areas were designated as part of the Oslo Accords, signed by the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Israel in 1993 and 1995.²³

- Area A constitutes approximately 18 percent of the West Bank in which the Palestinian Authority controls most affairs, including internal security.²⁴
- Area B comprises a further 21 percent of the West Bank, in which the Palestinian Authority controls education, health and the economy. In both areas, Israeli authorities have full external security control. Approximately 2.8 million Palestinians live in Areas A and B whose major Palestinian cities and towns are Hebron, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Nablus.²⁵
- Area C is the largest section of the West Bank, forming about 60 percent of the Palestinian territory. Security, planning and construction matters in this area remain in Israeli control.²⁶ It is also the site of most Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) map also supplies data on the current population across the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the population density in the West Bank and Gaza strip. They include that of the 4.8 million people living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, 50 percent are refugees. Almost the same proportion are under the age of 18.

Figure 1 (overleaf): Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, [‘The West Bank Including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, January 2019’](#), 5 July 2019.²⁷

²² *New York Times* (£), [‘White House Unveils Economic Portion of Middle East Peace Plan’](#), 22 June 2019.

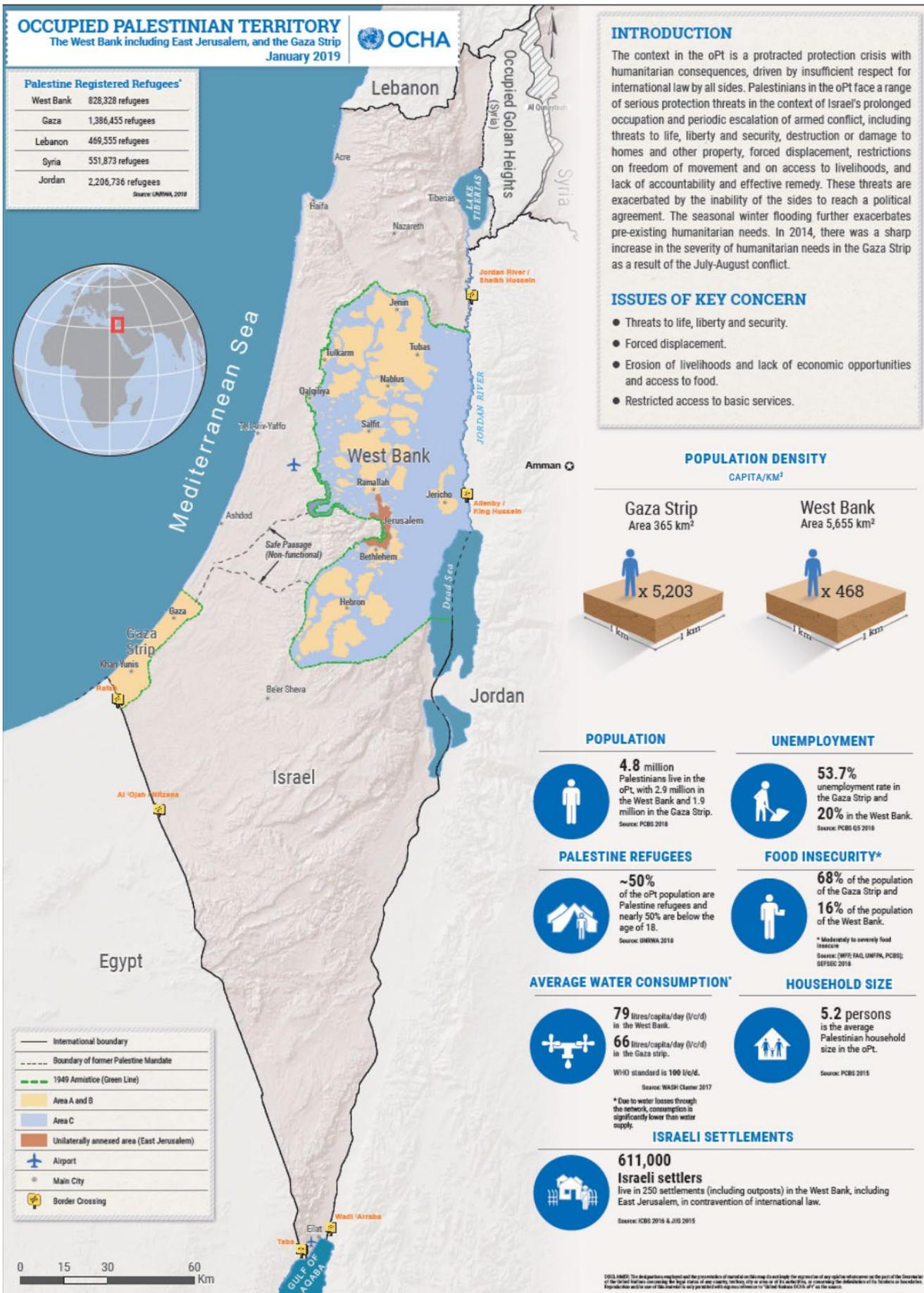
²³ Al Jazeera, [‘What Are Areas A, B, and C of the Occupied West Bank?’](#), 11 September 2019.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations or the House of Lords Library concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.



The US 'Peace to Prosperity' plan provides the following maps (figures 2 and 3) revealing how future states of Israel and Palestine could look according to the terms of the proposals.

Figure 2:



Source: White House, [Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People](#), January 2020, p 45.

Figure 3:



Source: White House, [Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People](#), January 2020, p 46.

3. International Reaction to the Plan

Israeli figures have welcomed the proposals. Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, described the plans as “the deal of the century”, which presented “a great plan for Israel” and “a great plan for peace”.²⁸ Mr Netanyahu also said the ‘status quo’ of Israeli control over the Palestinian territories would remain in place until a deal was reached. This, he expected, would take years. Similarly, with Mr Netanyahu and Benny Gantz due to contest a third general election in twelve months in March 2020, Mr Gantz said he would enact the plan at once should he become Prime Minister and said it would form the basis of any future arrangement.²⁹

In contrast, Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, responded to the plan with “a thousand no’s”. He called it a “conspiracy” and was particularly critical of the proposals concerning Jerusalem, saying that “Jerusalem is not for sale. Our rights are not for sale”.³⁰ Similarly, in Gaza, Hamas officials have described the proposals as worthless and called for them to be “consigned to the dustbin of history”.³¹ Mr Abbas told a meeting of the Arab League in Cairo on 1 February 2020 that the Palestinian Authority had informed Israel and the United States that it was ceasing cooperation with them, saying the Palestinians would have “no relations at all with [Israel] and the United States including security ties”.³²

Countries across the Middle East have reacted in mixed ways to the proposals. Representatives of the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman all attended President Trump’s launch of the peace plan with Israeli officials. Emirati envoy Yousef al-Otaiba was appreciative of continued US efforts to reach a Palestine-Israel peace agreement. He said, “this plan is a serious initiative that addresses many issues raised over the years”.³³ He added:

The only way to guarantee a lasting solution is to reach an agreement between all concerned parties [...] The UAE believes that Palestinians and Israelis can achieve lasting peace and genuine coexistence with the support of the international community. The plan announced today offers an important starting point for a return to negotiations within a US-led international framework.³⁴

Jordan—one of only two Arab nations to have a peace deal with Israel—has called for “just and lasting peace that meets all the legitimate rights of the brotherly Palestinian people” but suggested a two-state solution would need to respect Palestinian claims to territories occupied by Israel since the Six-Day War of 1967, including an East Jerusalem capital.³⁵ Jordanian officials added “Jordan must condemn unilateral Israeli measures in violation of international law and provocative actions that push the region toward more tension and escalation”.³⁶ Foreign Minister, Ayman Safad, said “Jordan will

²⁸ *Guardian*, ‘[Trump Unveils Middle East Peace Plan with no Palestinian Support](#)’, 28 January 2020.

²⁹ *Times of Israel*, ‘[Gantz Vows to Advance US Peace Plan Immediately if Elected Prime Minister](#)’, 1 February 2020.

³⁰ *Newsweek*, ‘[How the Middle East is Reacting to Donald Trump’s Israeli-Palestinian Peace Plan](#)’, 28 January 2020.

³¹ *Guardian*, ‘[Trump Unveils Middle East Peace Plan with No Palestinian Support](#)’, 28 January 2020.

³² *Financial Times* (£), ‘[Palestinians Sever Ties with US and Israel](#)’, 2 February 2020. This follows the decision by the Palestinian Authority to break off contact with the Trump administration following the latter’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital city in December 2017.

³³ *Newsweek*, ‘[How the Middle East is Reacting to Donald Trump’s Israeli-Palestinian Peace Plan](#)’, 28 January 2020.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *Bloomberg*, ‘[Independent Palestine State is Solution for Peace, Jordan Says](#)’, 28 January 2020.

³⁶ *ibid.*

continue to work with Arab countries and the international community for realising peace”. It would offer support for “every real effort aimed at achieving a just and comprehensive peace accepted by the peoples”.³⁷

Egypt has offered a similarly qualified response to the proposals. The Egyptian foreign ministry said the country appreciates the continued efforts made by the American administration to reach a “comprehensive and just peace for the Palestinian cause, thus contributing to supporting stability and security in the Middle East, and ending the Palestinian-Israeli conflict”.³⁸ The statement further called on both sides to:

Carefully study the American vision for achieving peace, find out all its dimensions, and open channels of dialogue to resume negotiations under American auspices, to put forward the vision of the Palestinian and Israeli parties towards it, in order to reach an agreement that meets the aspirations and hopes of the two peoples in achieving a comprehensive and just peace between them.³⁹

The Egyptian foreign ministry said any solution should grant Palestinians their “full legitimate rights through the establishment of their independent sovereign state over the occupied Palestinian territories, in accordance with international legitimacy”.⁴⁰

Saudi Arabia has said it had reviewed the US plan and would support any path toward realising “a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue”.⁴¹ The Saudi Arabian foreign ministry added:

The kingdom [of Saudi Arabia] appreciates the efforts made by the Trump administration to develop a comprehensive peace plan between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, and encourages the initiation and direct negotiations of peace between the Palestinian and Israeli sides under the auspices of the United States of America and to address any differences on any aspects of the plan through negotiations.⁴²

In contrast and using similar language used by Palestinian leaders, Iran has described the deal as “the betrayal of the century”. It said the “only solution to the Palestinian crisis will be to hold a referendum among the main inhabitants of the land of Palestine”.⁴³ Turkey has been similarly critical, with Turkish officials saying that “this is an annexation plan aiming to destroy the two-state solution and seize the Palestinian territories. The people and the land of Palestine cannot be bought off”.⁴⁴

The European Union has rejected the proposals. High Representative of the European Union, Josep Borrell, said that the plan departed from internationally agreed parameters. Specifically, the commitments to a two-state solution based along the pre-1967 lines, with the possibility of mutually agreed-upon land swaps, made up of the State of Israel and “an independent, democratic, contiguous,

³⁷ Bloomberg, [‘Independent Palestine State is Solution for Peace, Jordan Says’](#), 28 January 2020.

³⁸ Newsweek, [‘How the Middle East is Reacting to Donald Trump’s Israeli-Palestinian Peace Plan’](#), 28 January 2020.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *Jerusalem Post*, [‘Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, UAE Welcome Trump Peace Plan’](#), 29 January 2020.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Newsweek, [‘How the Middle East is Reacting to Donald Trump’s Israeli-Palestinian Peace Plan’](#), 28 January 2020.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

sovereign and viable State of Palestine”.⁴⁵ Mr Borrell added:

The European Union calls on both sides to re-engage and to refrain from any unilateral actions contrary to international law that could exacerbate tensions. We are especially concerned by statements on the prospect of annexation of the Jordan Valley and other parts of the West Bank. In line with international law and relevant UN Security Council resolutions, the EU does not recognise Israel’s sovereignty over the territories occupied since 1967. Steps towards annexation, if implemented, could not pass unchallenged.⁴⁶

The UK Government has been receptive to the proposals. The Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, said in response to oral questions in the House of Commons that:

We welcome the US proposals for peace talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians based on recognition of the two-state solution. We support this initiative to get both sides around the negotiating table.⁴⁷

He added:

This is a first step on the road back to negotiations. The absence of dialogue creates a vacuum that only fuels instability and leads to the drifting of the two sides further and further apart, so whatever the different views, we want both sides to get around the negotiating table to work to improve the plan and to get peace in the Middle East.⁴⁸

Mr Raab further noted the number of parties who had called upon both sides to return to the negotiation process. These included “the French, the Italians, EU High Representative Josep Borrell, Japan, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Oman”.⁴⁹ He said that the UK Government had been speaking to representatives of both sides:

I have spoken to the Americans. I also spoke to President Abbas on 27 January. The reality is that whatever concerns any side has about this set of proposals, they will get resolved and improved only with both sides around the negotiating table. Rejectionism—the current vacuum—is only making matters worse. We would like to see peaceful dialogue and a negotiated solution, and that must be based on the two-state solution and the principles of international law.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ European Union External Action Service, [‘Statement by the High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell on the US Initiative’](#), 4 February 2020.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ [HC Hansard, 4 February 2020, col 163.](#)

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

4. Further Reading

- Congressional Research Service, [Israel and the Palestinians: U.S. Peace Plan and Possible Israeli Annexation](#), 30 January 2020
- European Council on Foreign Relations, [Trump's Deal for Israel-Palestine: Entrenched Unequal Rights and Annexation](#), 29 January 2020
- Atlantic Council, [Trump's New Middle East Peace Deal: A Real Path or Dead on Arrival?](#), 28 January 2020
- Bernard Avishai, [The Most Immediate, Unexpected Threat of Trump's Middle East Peace Plan](#), *New Yorker*, 10 February 2020
- *Jerusalem Post*, [For the Trump Peace Plan to Work, Palestinians Must Give Peace a Chance](#), 2 February 2020
- Hady Amr and Ilan Goldenberg, [We Know Peace Plans—This Isn't One of Them](#), *Foreign Policy*, 27 January 2020
- Douglas J Feith, [Trump Tries 'Constructive Resignation' in the Mideast](#), Hudson Institute, 29 January 2020
- Shibley Tehhami, [Trump's Middle East Plan: What Does America Stand for?](#), Brookings, 4 February 2020
- Keith Johnson, [The Big Missing Piece of the Kushner Plan: Water](#), *Foreign Policy*, 4 February 2020
- Joshua Mitnick, [For Netanyahu, Trump's White House is the Gift That Keeps on Giving](#), *Foreign Policy*, 27 January 2020
- Council on Foreign Relations, [Global Conflict Tracker: Israeli-Palestinian Conflict](#), accessed 10 February 2020
- Khaled Elgindy, [Trump's Peace Plan Aims to Make Israeli Occupation Permanent](#), *Foreign Policy*, 29 January 2020