



Israel and the Palestinians: U.S. Peace Plan and Possible Israeli Annexation

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President Trump released a [long-promised “Peace to Prosperity” plan](#) for Israel and the Palestinians on January 28, 2020, after obtaining support from Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Netanyahu’s main political rival [Benny Gantz](#). The release and Netanyahu’s announced intention to annex parts of the [Israeli military-controlled West Bank](#) [might affect a closely-contested Israeli election](#) scheduled for March 2—the [third in the past year](#) pitting Netanyahu (who has been [indicted](#) on corruption charges) and Gantz against one another. Members of Congress have had [mixed reactions](#) to the plan, which has been widely seen as [favoring Israeli positions](#) more than [past U.S. efforts](#) on these issues.

Prospects for negotiations seem dim given concerted opposition from Palestinian leaders. Amid a variety of regional and international reactions, some [key Arab states](#) have encouraged negotiations, and U.S. officials say that the Palestinians will have [four years](#) to satisfy the conditions on obtaining statehood (see below).

Key Points of the Plan

As [released](#) and [summarized](#), the plan suggests the following key outcomes for future Israeli-Palestinian negotiations:

- **Borders and settlements.** Israel would acquire sovereignty over [about 30%](#) of the West Bank (see [Figure 1](#)), including [settlements](#) and most of the [Jordan Valley](#). The Palestinians could eventually acquire a form of sovereignty (as described below) over the remaining territory. The territory would include areas that the Palestinian Authority (PA) currently administers, and additional land acquired in compensatory swaps—with a number of non-contiguous areas connected by roads, bridges, and tunnels (see [Figure 2](#) and [Figure 3](#)).

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- **Jerusalem and holy sites.** Israel would have sovereignty over nearly all of [Jerusalem](#), with the Palestinians able to obtain some small East Jerusalem areas on the other side of an Israeli security barrier. [According to David Friedman](#), U.S. ambassador to Israel, the [status quo](#) prohibiting non-Muslim worship on the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif would continue, along with Jordan’s custodial role regarding Muslim holy sites.
- **Security.** Israel would retain overall security control over the entire West Bank, with the potential for Palestinians to assume more security responsibility over time in territory that they administer.
- **Palestinian refugees.** Palestinian refugee claims would be satisfied through internationally-funded compensation and resettlement outside of Israel (i.e., no “right of return”) in the West Bank, Gaza, and third-party states.
- **Palestinian statehood.** The Palestinians could obtain a demilitarized state within the areas specified in [Figure 2](#) and [Figure 3](#), with a capital in [Abu Dis](#) or elsewhere straddling the East Jerusalem areas mentioned above and their outskirts. Statehood would depend on the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and PA meeting specified criteria that present considerable domestic challenges, including but not limited to disarming Hamas in Gaza, ending certain international initiatives and financial incentives for violence, and recognizing Israel as “the nation state of the Jewish people.”

PLO/PA Rejection and Possible Israeli Annexation

PLO Chairman and PA President Mahmoud Abbas [categorically rejected](#) the plan, in line with [previous PLO/PA statements](#) asserting that Trump Administration actions have undermined Palestinian positions, and in the context of [public polling](#) indicating opposition to U.S. efforts. In June 2019, PLO/PA leaders rejected the Administration’s [economic framework](#) for the peace plan, [insisting](#) that they would not bargain away their core national demands. In December 2017, the PLO/PA had suspended high-level contacts with the Administration after President Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. Since then, U.S.-Palestinian relations [have worsened](#) as the Administration has suspended U.S. aid, downgraded U.S.-Palestinian diplomatic ties, and boosted Israeli claims to Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, and West Bank territory.

Shortly after the plan’s release, [Netanyahu said](#) that his government would begin considering measures that would effectively unilaterally annex Israeli West Bank settlements and the Jordan Valley. The plan’s conceptual maps (see [Figure 1](#) and [Figure 2](#) below) identify West Bank areas that are eventually expected to come under Israeli sovereignty, and [Secretary of State Michael Pompeo](#) has said that the United States would support annexation that is consistent with the maps. Nevertheless, verifying a proposal’s consistency with the U.S. plan [may take months](#), and it is unclear whether Israel’s government—given its interim status—would have [domestic legal authority](#) to move forward. From an international standpoint, various U.N. Security Council [resolutions](#) and existing Israeli-Palestinian [agreements](#) provide for resolving the status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip via negotiations.

Questions

The U.S. plan and possible Israeli annexation moves could raise a number of questions with implications for U.S. policy, including:

- **Israeli political outcomes.** To what extent, if at all, might the plan and possible unilateral annexation moves influence voters in Israel’s March 2 election, or the subsequent government formation process?

- **Annexation.** How, both politically and legally, might Israel extend its sovereignty and/or law to West Bank territory, and what specific territory would it annex? How would annexation affect the rights, living situations, and interactions of Israeli settlers and Palestinians in affected territory? How would it affect the viability of a negotiated [two-state solution](#)?
 - **Immediate consequences.** How will Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza respond to the plan and any possible Israeli annexation in the West Bank? Will the PA continue to coordinate on West Bank security with Israel and observe the current [geographical division](#) of administrative responsibility? What factors could influence the intensity of any protests?
 - **Regional and international responses and impact.** How are key Arab states responding to the plan or possible annexation, and how is public opinion influencing leaders' stances? What will be the impact on [Jordan](#), its relations and peace treaty with Israel, the Palestinians that make up the majority of its population, the stability of its monarchy, and its support for U.S. military and political goals? How will other countries and international organizations, including the United Nations and [International Criminal Court](#), respond to the plan?
 - **Diplomatic prospects.** Can the plan, or parts of it, serve as a basis for future negotiations? Can economic penalties or incentives sway Palestinian decision-making? How might the plan affect U.S. political influence on Israeli-Palestinian matters and other global issues going forward?
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Figure I. Conceptual Map of Israel



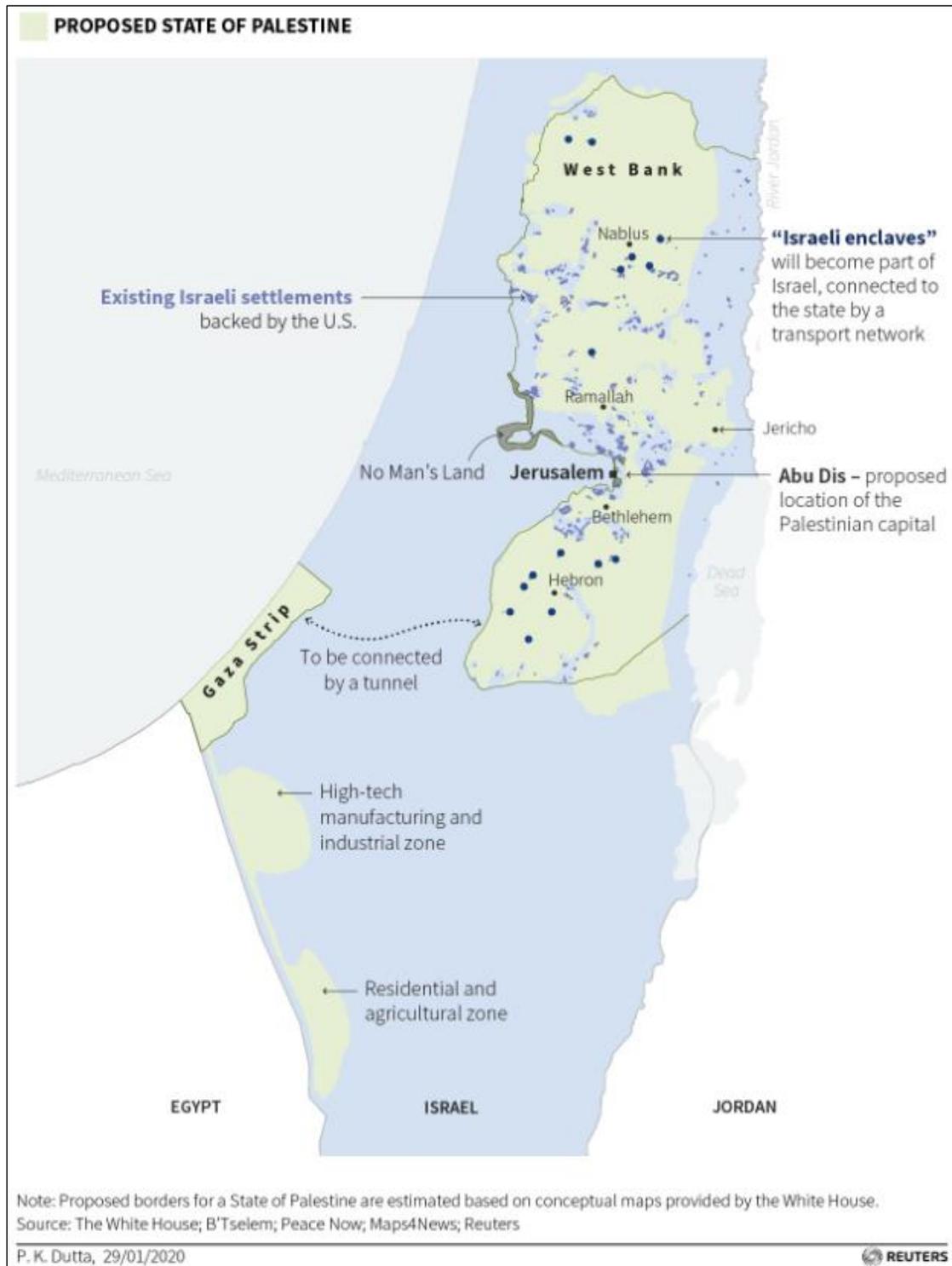
Source: U.S. peace plan, January 2020.

Figure 2. Conceptual Map of Future Palestinian State



Source: U.S. peace plan, January 2020.

Figure 3. Unofficial Map with Green Line



Notes: Green lines on map represent 1949-1967 Israel-Jordan armistice line (for West Bank) and 1950-1967 Israel-Egypt armistice line (for Gaza). All borders are approximate.

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