



**Mada al-Carmel: The Arab Center for Applied Social Research, Haifa**

## **The American-Israeli ‘Peace Plan’: A Textual and Political Analysis**

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This paper discusses Israeli efforts to definitively terminate the cause of Palestinian statehood after the announcement of the American ‘peace plan’ for Israel-Palestine (“Peace to Prosperity” or more colloquially the “Deal of the Century”).<sup>1</sup> In recent years, especially since the election of Donald Trump as US president in 2016, the a neo-Zionist project led by Benjamin Netanyahu and the Israeli right has focused on finally quashing the Palestinian cause, both politically and on the ground. The content of the US plan is consistent with these efforts, but in some respects it surpasses them, proposing ideas that have otherwise not been prioritized in Israeli political discussions on Palestine. The US plan would represent the political and moral surrender of the Palestinian national movement.

### **Implementation of the plan prior to its announcement**

The US plan is based on the principle of might is right, meaning that you take all facts on the ground as incontrovertible, even if they were illegally established. In this regard, the plan embraces the most extreme Israeli position on settlements and borders. It does not distinguish between government-sanctioned settlements and those established by rogue settlers at their own initiative. The rate of settlement growth and expansion has risen since the election of Donald Trump, and has accelerated further in the past year. The current Israeli minister of defense, Naftali Bennett, has taken several measures to strengthen Israeli control over Area C, whose annexation he has demanded ever since he entered politics.<sup>2</sup> To strengthen Israeli sovereignty over these areas, Bennett announced the demarcation of seven new nature reserves in the West Bank, as well as the expansion of twelve existing reserves. The aim of this policy is to prevent Palestinians from expanding in these areas, and to restrict Palestinian space under the guise of preserving nature. It is worth noting that some settlement outposts have been established within these reserves on Palestinian public and private land; Israel has not dismantled them.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The White House, *Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People* (Washington, DC: Author, 2020), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Peace-to-Prosperity-0120.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Muhannad Mustafa, “Annexation in the Current Israeli Debate: The Dialectic of Citizenship and Land,” *Israeli Affairs Journal*, vol. 66, 2017, 37–51.

<sup>3</sup> The Israeli Supreme Court rejected a petition submitted by a group of Israelis (forty individuals) to cancel the nature reserve Em Zuka in which a settlement outpost was built because it discriminates between

There are fifty-one nature reserves in Area C covering 500,000 dunums, and the new nature reserves announced by Bennett cover a further 130,000 dunums.<sup>4</sup>

According to data supplied by Peace Now, 427,000 settlers were living in the West Bank (excluding Jerusalem) in 2018. They constitute 5 percent of the total population of the State of Israel. 132 settlements have been established by government say-so, whereas 121 outposts have been independently established.<sup>5</sup>

The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs published a report regarding settlements in April 2019 on the eve of the announcement of US plan. The president of this center is Dore Gold, Netanyahu's former consultant. According to this report, there were approximately 448,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank (approximately 15 percent of the total population living in the West Bank). According to estimates used by the center, , there are 1.7 million Palestinians in the West Bank, which means that the settler population would be 26 percent of the total West Bank population.<sup>6</sup> The data used by the center is consistent with Peace Now data, which puts the settlers at 4 percent of Israel's total population. Seventy-seven percent of the settlers live in settlement clusters. The policy of extending Israeli sovereignty over these clusters enjoys broad support inside Israel. Other settlers live deep within the West Bank. All settlers live in Area C.

The center's data is based on statistics from the Settler Council. This council undoubtedly played a role in determining the details of the Trump plan, including the idea of imposing Israeli sovereignty upon areas of the West Bank.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 1. West Bank Land**

	<b>Square kilometers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Area A	982,000	17.1
Area B	1,035,000	18.1

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Palestinian and Jewish settlers. Moreover, Judge Menahem Mazuz called the lawyer who submitted the petition a provocateur. (Amira Hess, In the West bank settlers recruit nature to their mission- with the high court's consent, *Haaretz*, 17\1\2020,p:17.)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> "West Bank Population," Peace Now website, <https://peacenow.org.il/en/settlements-watch/settlements-data/population>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Nature reserves	166,000	2.9
Area C	3,539,000	61.9
West Bank	5,722,000	100.0

Table 1 shows that Area C constitutes almost 62 percent of the West Bank. The table also reveals how nature reserves areas are used to control areas of the West Bank and to restrict Palestinian construction and agriculture development.

In 2019, settlement expansion policies continued in Area C in preparation for its the annexation, even before the announcement of the US plan. These policies ran alongside restrictions placed on Palestinians in these areas and fit with right-wing government plans to annex this area. A report published by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) regarding Israeli policies in these areas stated that Palestinian home demolitions and expropriations in Area C increased by 45 percent in 2019; 393 buildings were demolished or expropriated in 2019, of which 116 buildings had been donated by international bodies, compared to 271 buildings demolished or expropriated in 2018 (see Table 2).<sup>8</sup>

**Table 2. Demolition and Expropriation of Palestinian Buildings in Area C in 2019**

	<b>Buildings demolished</b>	<b>Buildings expropriated</b>	<b>Palestinians Made Homeless</b>
2017	256	14	398
2018	226	45	218
2019	328	65	507

The report further indicates that the number of Palestinians left homeless as a result of the demolition or expropriation of their homes has increased from 218 in 2018 to 507 in 2019. Restrictions on the construction of housing are detailed in Resolution no.

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<sup>8</sup> Reported in Hagar Shizaf, “United Nations: In 2019 the Number of Buildings Demolished or Expropriated in Area C Was Increased,” *Haaretz*, January 7, 2020, p. 4.

1797, which enables Civil Administration supervisors to demolish or expropriate buildings built without a license within ninety-six hours of the first notice issued to the buildings' owners. During this period, the owners have no practical or procedural means at their disposal to appeal against the order. Since assuming the position of Minister of Defense, Naftali Bennett has been working on developing a plan to freeze all Palestinian construction in these areas for two years.<sup>9</sup> During talks with Bennett about Palestinian construction in Area C, the army presented data showing that this area constitutes 60 percent of the West Bank, in which approximately 200,000 Palestinians live in twenty-five organized, planned villages as well as in hundreds of clusters unrecognized by the Israeli Civil Administration. Furthermore, Palestinians were starting to build more than 1,000 additional unlicensed units. Bennett asked the army and the Territories Coordinator in the government, as well as the Civil Administration, to ramp up Israeli supervision in order to prevent Palestinian construction. He also made efforts to stop European funding for Palestinian construction in these areas. Army data indicates that most construction is funded by Europe. Ramping up supervision and restricting funding works effectively deters construction.<sup>10</sup>

Bennett's measures are part of a wider policy of restricting Palestinian construction in Area C. According to Civil Administration data, Palestinians submitted 1,485 construction requests in these areas between 2006 and 2008.<sup>11</sup> The Civil Administration approved twenty-one requests in that time (1.4 percent of the total requests). In the same period, the Civil Administration issued 2,147 demolition orders of Palestinian buildings in these areas. The Civil Administration revealed that it issued only fifty-six construction permits for Palestinians during the same period. thirty-five of these were not based on requests made by Palestinians, but were instead given out as part of a plan to transfer members of Al-Jahaleen tribe, who live near Ma'ale Adumim settlement, into the neighborhood of Al-Jabal, adjacent to Al-Eizariya.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ariel Kahana, "Bennett's Plan: 'We Will End the Palestinian Control'," *Israel Hayom*, December 19, 2019, <https://www.israelhayom.co.il/article/717217>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> The Civil Administration did not disclose this information willingly, but only after the organization Bimkom requested this information from the Civil Administration, which was granted through the Freedom of Information Law.

<sup>12</sup> Hagar Shizaf, "In Three Years, 98.6% of Palestinian Construction Requests in Area C Were Rejected," *Haaretz*, January 22, 2020, p. 3.

As for the data revealed by the Civil Administration on the issuing of construction permits in Area C, it was found that in the last two decades (2000–2018) Palestinians submitted 6,532 permit requests, of which a mere 210 (3.2 percent) were approved (Table 3). The data disclosed by the Civil Administration shows that the restriction of Palestinian construction began in the late 1980s, during the first intifada, and intensified after the Oslo Agreement was signed. For example, in 1972, Palestinians requested 2,199 construction permits of which 2,134 were approved (97 percent). In 1973, 96 percent of requests made were approved, but by 1988, only 32 percent were approved.<sup>13</sup>

This indicates that efforts to expand settlements in the West Bank and to impose facts on the ground in Israel’s favor during negotiations, also manifested in the practice of restricting Palestinian construction in the West Bank. Out of 240 Palestinian villages in Area C, only 27 villages have approved structural plans, and under approved plans Palestinians are allowed to build on only 0.5 percent of the land of Area C. In contrast, settlement plans in Area C were approved over 26 percent of the land.

**Table 3. Construction and Demolition Permits in Area C**

	<b>2018–2016</b>	<b>2018--2000</b>	<b>1972</b>
Demolition orders	2,147		
Actual demolitions	90		
Construction permit requests	1,485	6,532	2,199
Number of approved permits (percentage of total)	%1.4) 21	(%3.2) 210	(%97) 2134

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

## **The US plan and Israel: Reformulating the rules of the conflict and its resolution**

This section analyzes the outcomes proposed in the US plan and their links to the Israeli sentiments about the following central issues: Jerusalem, the question of refugees, borders, and the Gaza Strip.

The US plan fully embraces and uncritically endorses the Israeli Zionist narrative. Words such as "occupation" and "occupied" do not appear in the plan at all (see Table 4). Israel is portrayed as the victim of repeated attacks since 1948 and as willing to compromise constantly for peace. According to the US plan, Israel has already ceded 88 percent of the lands that it "captured" or "controlled" since 1967. The plan completely obscures the Palestinian narrative; any term or concept that is relevant to Palestinian perspectives, rights or demands is completely absent.

The plan aims to change the internationally accepted paradigm for resolving the conflict, and the paradigms accepted by previous US administrations. The plan corresponds with Benjamin Netanyahu's approach to defeating the Palestinian national movement. It is based on his view of the conflict,<sup>14</sup> and portrays the national movement as a criminal, terrorist organization. In this view, Israel is seen as victimized by a Palestinian terrorist movement working to prevent Jews from implementing their right of self-determination in their historical, biblical, and legal homeland.<sup>15</sup> Aluf Benn, editor of *Haaretz* newspaper, describes the deal as Trump saying to the Palestinians, in effect,

you have lost the war and it's time you realize it. The Palestinian national movement which relied thus far on rejecting Zionism as a colonial, racist, and criminal movement, is requested now to change its national ideology and teaching curriculums and articles in the official newspaper, in order to build a new narrative that grasps Zionism as a just movement that brought back the Jewish people to the country after 2000 years in exile. The Palestinians are the poor neighbors of the Jewish state, and they can enjoy imperfect freedom if they

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<sup>14</sup> To review more of Netanyahu's perceptions, see Antwan Shulhut, *Benjamin Netanyahu: The No Resolution Doctrine* (Ramallah: Madar— The Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Aluf Benn, "History of the Victors," *Haaretz*, January 30, 2020, p. 3.

accept a land amputated by settlements and controlled from every direction as well as from the air.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 4. Israeli alternative terms as used in the plan’s text**

<b>Term</b>	<b>The alternative term</b>
Occupation	Captured territory, seized territory
Israeli wars	Defensive wars
Occupied	Captured, took control
Palestinian acts of resistance	Terrorist attacks
Palestinian movements	Terrorist groups
Israeli prisoners	Captives

Michael Herzog, a retired Israeli military leader and researcher in Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the Jewish People Policy Institute, describes the US plan as presenting a new paradigm for dealing with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.<sup>17</sup> The paradigm that guided Israel in previous negotiations was that the conflict is between two national movements with their own historical narratives and conflicting political demands. Both struggled for the same land in the face of clear and visible demographic realities. Within this paradigm, it is understood that the Palestinian side will not throw away its narrative. Therefore, to preserve Israel as a Jewish, democratic state, it must reach an agreed-upon compromise between the two sides based on separating the two political entities, and dividing the land between them. According to Herzog, “the Trump paradigm proposes a different paradigm. For the first time, in coordination with Israel, the United States proposes a wholly separate plan which redraws the map and claims to ultimately resolve all issues related to the conflict. This plan is biased towards the historical narrative of the Jewish national movement- it only defines as fact that which suits the needs of this one party, characterizing them as the ‘right’ party to the exclusion and detriment of the other.” The plan revisits issues raised by both the 1967 war and the

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Herzog, “Such a Bet on the Future of Israel Requires a Referendum,” *Haaretz*, February 14, 2020, p. 23.

1948 war. It includes the recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Holy Haram, it eliminates the right of return, re-defines borders determined by the 1948 war by blurring the events of 1948 and 1967 together, and proposes to move the ‘Triangle’ area of Israel to the Palestinian state by way of a historical correction.

We concur with Herzog's analysis. This particular paradigm of 1948 was proposed by Netanyahu in his famous Bar Ilan speech, in which he posited that the problem was not what happened in 1967, but rather in 1948, namely the Palestinians’ refusal to acknowledge Israel as a Jewish state. Netanyahu considered such acknowledgment as a prerequisite to moving towards a political compromise with the Palestinian national movement.<sup>18</sup> The US plan has embraced this narrative by stipulating that a Palestinian state will not emerge unless it recognizes Israel as a Jewish state (Table 5),<sup>19</sup> and further mirrors the content of the Bar Ilan speech in many ways.

**Table 5. Comparison of extracts from Bar Ilan speech (2009) and the US plan (2020)**

	<b>Bar Ilan speech<sup>20</sup></b>	<b>The US plan</b>
The Jewish state	The Palestinian leadership must rise and simply say: "we have had enough of this conflict. We recognize the right of the Jewish People to a state its own in this Land. We will live side by side in true peace."	Palestinian leaders must embrace peace by recognizing Israel as the Jewish state. (p. 4)
Demilitarized state	If we get a guarantee of demilitarization, and if the Palestinians recognize Israel as the Jewish state, we are ready to agree to a real peace agreement, a demilitarized Palestinian state side by side with the Jewish state.	The State of Palestine shall be fully demilitarized and remain so. (p. 22)

<sup>18</sup> Muhannad Mustafa, *Benjamin Netanyahu, Re-producing the Zionist Project Within the Clash of Civilizations System* (Istanbul: Vision for Political Development, 2019).

<sup>19</sup> The plan mentions this stipulation on pp. 4, 7, and 37.

<sup>20</sup> See Bar Ilan speech in English on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the following link: <https://ecf.org.il/issues/issue/70>

Political narrative	Whoever thinks that the continued hostility to Israel is a result of our forces in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza is confusing cause and effect. The attacks on us began in the 1920s, became an overall attack in 1948 when the state was declared, continued in the 1950s with the fedayeen attacks, and reached their climax in 1967 on the eve of the Six-Day War, with the attempt to strangle Israel. All this happened nearly 50 years before a single Israeli soldier went into Judea and Samaria.	Since the moment of its establishment, the State of Israel has not known a single day of peace with all of its neighbors. It has fought numerous defensive wars, some existential in nature, as well as asymmetric battles with terrorist groups. (p. 44)
Historical–religious narrative	The connection of the Jewish People to the Land is more than 3,500 years old. Judea and Samaria, the places where our forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob walked, our forefathers David, Solomon, Isaiah and Jeremiah—this is not a foreign land, this is the Land of our Forefathers.	Jerusalem became the political center of the Jewish people when King David united the twelve tribes of Israel, making the city the capital and spiritual center of the Jewish people, which it has remained for nearly 3,000 years. (p. 15)
Peace and prosperity	Let us join hands and work together in peace, together with our neighbors. There is no limit to the flourishing growth that we can achieve for both peoples—in the economy, in agriculture, in commerce, tourism, education—but, above all, in the ability to give our younger generation hope to live in a place that's good to live	There has been a false notion that the lack of opportunity for the Palestinian people is Israel's sole responsibility. Solving the final status issues, in the manner described in this Vision,

	<p>in, a life of creative work, a peaceful life with much of interest, with opportunity and hope.</p>	<p>would create the necessary conditions for investment to start flowing into the region. We estimate that combining this political solution with the economic vision for investments and government reforms that we have laid out will lead to historic economic growth. (p. 4)</p>
<p>Refugees</p>	<p>We need a clear agreement to solve the Palestinian refugee problem outside of the borders of the State of Israel. For it is clear to all that the demand to settle the Palestinian refugees inside of Israel, contradicts the continued existence of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish People... Therefore, justice and logic dictates that the problem of the Palestinian refugees must be solved outside the borders of the State of Israel. There is broad national agreement on this. I believe that with good will and international investment of we can solve this humanitarian problem once and for all.</p>	<p>Proposals that demand that the State of Israel agree to take in Palestinian refugees, or that promise tens of billions of dollars in compensation for the refugees, have never been realistic. (p. 31) The Israeli–Palestinian Peace Agreement shall provide for a complete end and release of any and all claims relating to refugee or immigration status. There shall be no right of return by, or absorption of, any Palestinian refugee into the State of Israel. (p. 32)</p>

<p>"Jewish refugees"</p>	<p>We must solve the problem of the Arab refugees. And I believe that it is possible to solve it. Because we have proven that we ourselves solved a similar problem. Tiny Israel took in the hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees from Arab countries who were uprooted from their homes.</p>	<p>The Arab–Israeli conflict created both a Palestinian and Jewish refugee problem. Nearly the same number of Jews and Arabs were displaced by the Arab/Israeli conflict. Nearly all of the Jews have since been accepted and permanently resettled in Israel or other countries around the world. (p. 31)</p> <p>The Jewish refugee issue, including compensation for lost assets... Additionally, the State of Israel deserves compensation for the costs of absorbing Jewish refugees from those countries. (p. 31)</p>
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The US plan was inspired by the idea of an economic peace that Netanyahu developed in the early years of his rule. This approach considered economic considerations to be more significant than key political and national questions. Such an approach had previously failed because of Palestinian, Arab, and international rejection. The US plan revives the idea of an economic peace, however more progressively, through presenting a detailed economic plan- one which is seemingly able to predict economic turnouts for the next decade. The plan tries to give Palestinians an economic incentive, promising that the Palestinian GDP will double itself within a decade, a million new job opportunities will be created, and unemployment will be reduced to less than 10

percent, thus lowering the rate of poverty within Palestinian society.<sup>21</sup> The plan is crammed with economic promises. It allocates a total amount of US\$27 billion to be invested in the Palestinian state over ten years (US\$2.7 billion a year) in exchange for abandoning the Palestinian national project. The plan offers special privileges to the Palestinian state with Israel's assistance, for example continuing the use of Haifa and Ashdod ports for Palestinian export and import. It also suggests establishing a free commerce zone between Jordan and the state of Palestine.<sup>22</sup> Israel does not oppose any of the plan's economic components as they do not in reality constitute new proposals; they are in fact already in place. Although the plan somewhat broadens the economic privileges of the Palestinian state, the essence of what is currently extant will remain according to the plan. Israel will massively benefit from the economic component of the plan, as over time it will keep the Palestinian state economically dependent on the Israeli economy.

Writing about the borders proposed in the US plan, Israeli researcher Shaul Arieli argued that the plan is a proposal for apartheid:

The Deal must vanish; it does not have and will never have an Arab partner. The international reactions indicate that annexation will not be legitimized. The Deal will reflect very badly on Israel. It is based on legitimizing the current reality, in which two different judicial systems are practiced over the same land, based on an ethnic criterion. Adding the idea of annexation will transform this reality into apartheid, or according to the definition of David Ben Gurion from 1949, to *a dictatorship of the minority...* the Deal will cause tremendous damage to the Palestine Liberation Organization, that has been attempting since 1988 to lead a diplomatic praxis rather than armed struggle to reach a resolution of the conflict ...it will be pushed to stop security coordination with Israel. [The Deal] violates the principle of citizenship as it proposes transferring Arab citizens in Israel to

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<sup>21</sup> *Peace to Prosperity*, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

Palestine. It also violates the rule of law and the right to property by legitimizing illegal outposts built on stolen Palestinian land.<sup>23</sup>

### **Borders and Settlements**

The plan includes a new border plan. It takes as its basis the assumption of two principles: mutual recognition of two political entities, Israel and Palestine, recognizing that Israel is the state of the Jewish people; and a cessation of any future requests or resolutions, meaning that the deal would represent the final conclusion of the conflict and its many disputes.<sup>24</sup>

In the above-mentioned article, Arieli goes on to observe:

The proposed Palestinian state will be a region without any geographical continuum or external borders, and thus becomes one big enclave with borders that reach 1400 kilometers, i.e., 1.5 times the current Israeli borders. Within this enclave, there will be 15 Israeli enclaves (settlements), and within Israel, there will be 54 Palestinian enclaves (Palestinian villages). International precedent indicates that aside from Holland and Belgium, such enclaves are not effectively implementable between parties in emotionally charged and violent disputes. The army will be used to protect such enclaves and overlapping borders will prevent the establishment of separate economic systems. It will not allow the Palestinians to get rid of the suffocating taxes it currently has to abide by... half of the land that will be annexed to Israel is privately owned. The proposition to declare the neighborhoods beyond the wall in Jerusalem such as Kafr Aqab, Samiramis, Shu'fat Refugee Camp, as well as the town of Abu Dis as the Palestinian capital is not practical or appropriate. In these neighborhoods, construction has been undertaken without planning, there are no official maps, the areas lack infrastructure and proper institutions. They are far from central routes or relevant economic centers.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Shaul Arieli, "15 Years Backwards," *Haaretz*, February 21, 2020, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> *Peace to Prosperity*, p. 38.

<sup>25</sup> Arieli, "15 Years Backwards," p. 23.

The map that accompanies the plan does not provide precise details and does not give specific percentages of land to be annexed, nor does it give the overall number of settlements to be maintained as enclaves within the Palestinian state and within Israel. According to the plan, Israel will annex the Jordan Valley and areas geographically contiguous with existing settlements, constituting approximately 30 percent of the West Bank. Fifteen settlements are marked to become enclaves within the Palestinian state.<sup>26</sup>

These small settlements deep in the West Bank act as strongholds for the terrorist settler religious right. Trump and his team who wrote the plan were unwilling to disassemble these settlements within the proposed Palestinian state. The Palestinian state outlined in the plan will lack any geographical contiguity; twelve tunnels and bridges will connect its different regions, and two bridges will link the West Bank and Jordan. (The Allenby Bridge and the inactive Adam Bridge will be cut off as a result of the annexation of the Jordan Valley.) A tunnel will connect the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Shaul Arieli drew a new map by pasting the Trump plan's version over the existing map of Israel. The new map indicates that Israel will annex 30 percent of the West Bank, and the state of Palestine will be given 14 percent of Israel, mostly areas that are uninhabited. This new map divides the West Bank twice, once by road no. 1, and again by the road to Ariel. Both routes completely amputate the West Bank.<sup>27</sup> Israel plans to annex areas of the West Bank, whilst putting legal mechanisms in place to prevent Palestinian residents in those areas from applying for Israeli citizenship. These efforts, according to Malkiel Balas, former deputy legal advisor to the Israeli government, are bound to eventually fail. Balas notes that these Palestinian islands within the annexed areas are bound to unite and merge with their surrounds in the future. He argues that any "legal obstacle built to prevent the Palestinians living in areas surrounded by Israel from becoming Israeli is destined to fall down."<sup>28</sup>

The plan states: "the State of Israel will benefit from having secure and recognized borders. It will not have to uproot any settlements and will incorporate the vast majority of Israeli settlements into contiguous Israeli territory. Israeli enclaves

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<sup>26</sup> They are: Otniel, Hermesh, Mevo Dotan, Elon Moreh, Itamar, Har Brakha, Yitzhar, Ateret, Ma'ale Amos, Metzad, Karmeit Tzur, Telem, Adora, Negohot, Beit Haga

<sup>27</sup> Hagar Shizaf, "Exchanging Regions in the Negev, a Debate About the Triangle: Israel According to Trump's Plan," *Haaretz*, January 30, 2020, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Malkiel Balas, "This is Not How You Annex," *Haaretz*, January 30, 2020, p. 13.



The Jordan Valley includes thirty settlements and eighteen outposts with approximately 12,000 settlers, alongside approximately 54,000 Palestinian citizens. Data indicates that the US plan would see about 5,000 Palestinians in the valley area and within Area C annexed to Israel.<sup>33</sup> According to Peace Now data, the annexation plan for the Jordan Valley proposed by Netanyahu will include 1,236 square kilometers, constituting 22.3 percent of the total area of the West Bank, in which 13,000 settlers and approximately 4,500 Palestinians live. Countries that support a two-state solution are unlikely to consider annexation as preventing further negotiations between Israel and Palestine in the future. This is based on the precedent of their responses to the annexation of Jerusalem in 1967 and the Golan Heights in 1981.

Since the Alon plan, and after the start of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Israeli discourse has focused on the idea of controlling the Jordan Valley for security purposes. For example, in his famous speech two weeks before his assassination, Yitzhak Rabin presented conditions for an ultimate resolution of the conflict which identified the Jordan Valley as the security border of Israel. In his book *Border Between Us and You*, Arieli notes that during Camp David talks, Ehud Barak took a minimal approach to this issue. Barak proposed that only a narrow strip of the Jordan Valley would be annexed, and a quarter of that area would be leased for a limited period of time. Arieli adds that the first time the Jordan Valley appeared on Israeli maps was in the Taba Conference in 2001. It did not appear on the Israeli maps during talks between Ehud Olmert and Mahmoud Abbas at the Annapolis Conference in 2007. Israel had previously proposed that it would maintain a security presence in the Jordan Valley for several years, after which security control will be transferred to a third party. In talks with US Secretary of State John Kerry in 2014, Netanyahu proposed that Israel have a security presence in the valley, but not sovereignty over it. The annexation of the Jordan Valley has reappeared on the agenda after the announcement of Naftali Bennett's proposal to annex Area C, including the Jordan

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<sup>33</sup> Hagar Shizaf, "Netanyahu and Gantz are Talking About Jordan Valley Annexation, But What Does It Mean?" *Haaretz*, January 24, 2020,

Valley. There have also been a number of attempts made by Knesset members from the Likud Party to annex the valley by legislative means.<sup>34</sup>

The US plan has revived the idea of annexing the area of northern Israel known as the Triangle to the Palestinian state.<sup>35</sup> The Triangle is made up of the following communities: Kafr Qara, Ar'ara, Baqa al-Gharbiyye, Umm al Fahm, Qalansawe, Tayibe, Kafr Qasim, Tira, Kafr Bara and Jaljulia. These communities, which largely self-identify as Palestinian, were originally designated to fall under Jordanian control during the Armistice Line negotiations in 1949, but ultimately were retained by Israel for military reasons that have since been mitigated. The US plan contemplates the possibility, subject to the agreement of both parties, that the borders of Israel will be redrawn so that the Triangle communities become part of the State of Palestine. In this agreement, the civil rights of the residents of the Triangle communities would be subject to the applicable laws and judicial rulings of the relevant authorities.<sup>36</sup>

Although the plan proposes that Israel yield the Triangle area, it does not appear in the attached map as part of the Palestinian state. Indeed, an Israeli political source confirmed that Netanyahu had not formulated his opinion on this matter, but that he does not rule out ceding the Triangle to the Palestinian state.<sup>37</sup> It is seen as a way of territorially compensating the Palestinians over the annexation of settlement land in the West Bank; Netanyahu has previously put this idea on the negotiations table in back in 2017.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Shaul Arieli, *Borders Between Us and You: The Israeli Palestinian Conflict and the Ways of its Settlement* (Tel Aviv: Yideot Publication and Hemed, 2013), 406–7. (Hebrew)

<sup>35</sup> To read more about the development of the idea to annex the Triangle to the Palestinian state, see “Muhannad Mustafa, “Um Al Fahem First”: Proposals for Geographic/Population Swap of Palestinians in Wadi Ara/the Triangle,” *Israeli Affairs Journal*, vol. 71, 2018, 30–71.

<sup>36</sup> *Peace to Prosperity*, p. 13.

<sup>37</sup> Itamar Eichner, “Senior Political Source: We are Considering the Possibility of Exchanging Population With Towns in Wadi Ara,” Ynet, January 28, 2020, <https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-5668148,00.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Amir Tibon and Noa Landau, “Transfer of the Triangle to the Palestinian Territories Was Initiated by Netanyahu,” *Haaretz*, February 4, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/.premium-1.8493680> (Hebrew)

## Jerusalem

The US plan endorses Trump's previous recognition of Jerusalem as the unified capital of Israel and his transfer of the American embassy to Jerusalem. The US plan mentions religious and biblical aspects, alongside the political reality that the city that was annexed to Israel right after the war in 1967. It also voices the Israeli claim that it maintains the holy city as a city of religious tolerance open to all. As such, the plan builds on and endorses three claims: it adopts the Israeli religious–historical narrative on Jerusalem; it accepts and legitimizes settler-colonial political control of Jerusalem; and it uncritically promotes Israeli propaganda about supporting equality, peace, and tolerance between the three Abrahamic religions. The stated aim of the plan is "to keep Jerusalem united, make it accessible to all and to acknowledge its holiness to all in a manner that is respectful to all."<sup>39</sup>

Regarding the political solution, the plan has this to say:

We believe that returning to a divided Jerusalem, and in particular having two separate security forces in one of the most sensitive areas on earth, would be a grave mistake. While a physical division of the city must be avoided, a security barrier currently exists that does not follow the municipal boundary and that already separates Arab neighborhoods (i.e., Kafr Aqab, and the eastern part of Shuafat) in Jerusalem from the rest of the neighborhoods in the city... This physical barrier should remain in place and should serve as a border between the capitals of the two parties... Jerusalem will remain the sovereign capital of the State of Israel, and it should remain an undivided city. The sovereign capital of the State of Palestine should be in the section 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, and could be named Al Quds or another name as determined by the State of Palestine.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Peace to Prosperity*, p. 15.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

As for the Palestinian citizens who will be living in the capital of Israel, the plan posts three choices for them to choose: First: to become citizens in the state of Israel. Second: to become citizens in the state of Palestine. Third: to maintain their status as permanent residents in the state of Israel.

The second choice would be the hardest to practically attain, given that the plan does not detail the procedures that would need to be taken if a Palestinian chose it. It merely states that "privileges, benefits and obligations of Arab residents of these areas who choose to become citizens of Palestine will be determined by the laws of the State of Palestine and the State of Israel, as applicable."<sup>41</sup> Regarding religious agreements in Jerusalem, the plan for all practical purposes breaks the current status quo agreement by officially allowing all religions to pray in the holy Haram.

### **The Refugees**

The US plan drops the refugee issue from negotiations and removes it as a final status issue, mirroring US steps to end US aid to the Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

The Israeli narrative on the issue of the Palestinian refugees consists of the following components:<sup>42</sup>

1. Israel is not politically or ethically responsible for the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem.
2. Israel will not accept under any circumstances the return of Palestinian refugees to areas within its sovereign borders. In the past, Israel has agreed in theory to the return of a very limited number of refugees to pre-1948 areas. During the Annapolis talks for example, it agreed to the return of 5,000 refugees.
3. Israel does not recognize the Palestinian refugee issue as ongoing because it does not consider the descendants of refugees to be refugees, and only considers refugee status as applicable to those who left the country during the 1948–49 war.
4. Israel believes that the refugee problem must be resolved by granting refugees citizenship in the countries where they have taken refuge (A moderate Israeli

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>42</sup> Shaul Arieli, *Borders Between Us and You: The Israeli Palestinian Conflict and the Ways of its Settlement* (Tel Aviv: Yideot Publication and Hemed, 2013), 406–7. (Hebrew)

- position accepts a selective and controlled return of refugees to a Palestinian political entity).
5. Israel will not take part in compensating Palestinian refugees because it rejects any historical responsibility for the creation of the refugee problem.
  6. The Israeli government has lately started to build a narrative around Jewish refugees from Arab countries. A special team was created for this matter under the Ministry of Social Equality led by Gila Gamliel, a Likud minister. According to this narrative, there is a Jewish refugee problem alongside a Palestinian one, and that Jewish refugees must be compensated because they left many of their physical and financial assets in their original homelands. The Israeli discourse on Jewish refugees has emerged as part of an effort to place the narrative of the victimization of Eastern Jews into the shrine of Israeli memory. The US plan took what had been a debate inside Israel and transformed it to leverage a compromise in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The US plan adopts the Israeli narrative on these two separate refugee issues and places them on an equal footing. However, the political solution for both issues will not be equal. According to the plan, Jewish refugees became citizens in Israel, and the Palestinian refugees must integrate and become citizens in the countries in which they live. In addition, the return of refugees to the Palestinian state must be approved by Israel and determined in light of its security considerations.<sup>43</sup> The plan also links the issue of Palestinian refugees with refugeehood as a generalized, international phenomenon, neutralizing the specificity of the Palestinian experience. Thus, the plan is fully consistent with the Israeli narrative and the discourse it uses. The plan notes: "proposals that demand that the State of Israel agrees to take in Palestinian refugees, or that promise tens of billions of dollars in compensation for the refugees, have never been realistic and a credible funding source has never been identified."<sup>44</sup> Therefore, compensation is

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<sup>43</sup> *Peace to Prosperity*, pp. 31–32.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

impossible because "the world struggles to find sufficient funds to support the over 70 million global refugees and displaced persons."<sup>45</sup>

### **The Gaza Strip**

In the US plan, a dedicated section is devoted to the Gaza Strip. The plan adopts the Israeli political narrative regarding the Gaza Strip. According to the plan, "Israel's withdrawal from Gaza nearly 15 years ago was meant to advance peace. Instead, Hamas, an internationally recognized terrorist group, gained control over the territory, and increased attacks on Israel, including the launching of thousands of rockets. Under the leadership of Hamas, the residents of Gaza have suffered extreme poverty and deprivation."<sup>46</sup> The plan naturally does not mention a word about the blockade on the Gaza Strip or Israel's many attacks on it. A newly published book written by Israeli social and military researcher Yagil Levy shows that Israel is more willing than US and UK armies to strike a civilian population. Levi compared the three armies and focused on Israel's attacks on the Gaza Strip. He refutes the Israeli narrative that the Israeli army is more sensitive to harming civilians by comparing its actions to the actions of the United States and Britain in their war in Afghanistan.<sup>47</sup>

The US plan conditionalizes Israeli implementation of the agreement on the acceptance of a compromise relating to the Gaza Strip. This demands that "first, the Palestinian Authority or another national or international body acceptable to the State of Israel is in full control of Gaza. Second, Hamas, [Islamic Jihad], and all other militias and terror organizations in Gaza are disarmed, and third, Gaza is fully demilitarized."<sup>48</sup> Additionally, as negotiations begin over these clauses, and upon the signing of a Israeli–Palestinian Peace Agreement, all Israeli captives and remains must be returned. If Hamas is to play any role in a Palestinian government, it must commit to the path of peace with the State of Israel by adopting the Quartet principles, which include unambiguously and explicitly recognizing the State of Israel.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>47</sup> Yagil Levy, *Whose Life Is Worth More? Hierarchies of Risk and Death in Contemporary Wars* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019).

<sup>48</sup> *Peace to Prosperity*, p. 26.

## **The US Israeli Plan: Conclusion**

In 2019, Israel started to implement the US plan through the following steps:

- a. Strengthening the settlements in the West Bank by enlarging the settlements and the routes leading to them; escalating house demolition in Area C
- b. Politically and economically pressuring the Palestinian Authority and attempting to minimize its political and social role in the West Bank, bringing it in line with the US plan's new delineation of its purview. This consists of only three central responsibilities: security coordination, provision of civil services to the population in its areas, and continuation of economic cooperation in service of the Israeli market.
- c. Separating the issue of the Gaza Strip from the issue of occupation in the West Bank, and in so doing maintaining current divisions in the Palestinian political landscape.
- d. Israel and its supporters abroad work on tagging any criticism of Zionism or of Israel as the national home of the Jews as antisemitic. Several European countries adopted the broad US definition of antisemitism, aiming to nullify the moral power of Palestinian political and critical discourse and its supporters. This discourse manifests in the rejection of occupation, Israel's control over an entire people, and obstructing that people's right to self-determination.<sup>49</sup>
- e. Israel has worked on strengthening its relations with Arab countries. The Madar Center have previously discussed this in their strategic reports. Israel not only aims to normalize its relations with the Arab world and build a regional Arab–Israeli alliance against Iran, but also aims to marginalize the Palestinian cause and to push it to the bottom of list of the Arab world's priorities. Israel also seeks to establish a shared view with some Arab countries with regards to the political ‘compromise’ it is trying to strike with the Palestinians.
- f. Israel is working in cooperation with the United States to delegitimize international organizations that give voice to Palestinian concerns. They claim that these groups have put Israel on trial and have unfairly condemned it. Israel

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<sup>49</sup> Anna Bresky, “The French Parliament Decided: Anti-Zionism is a Form of Anti-Semitism,” *Maariv*, December 3, 2019, <https://www.maariv.co.il/news/world/Article-733213>.

has attacked UNESCO on these grounds, and it has recently been trying to delegitimize the International Criminal Court, describing it as antisemitic. The US has cut off aid to the Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) which serves Palestinian refugees, and has supported Israel's side in disputes with international organizations.