

Eugene Kontorovich: Palestinians wrong to reject Trump Israeli-Palestinian peace plan - It's fair and just

The Israeli-Palestinian peace plan unveiled Tuesday by President Trump is an important and well-crafted effort that would benefit both sides by breaking the deadlock between the Jewish state and its Arab neighbors, which began with Israeli independence from Britain in 1948.

The almost immediate rejection of the plan by Palestinian leaders - and their progressive supporters in the U.S. - reveals more about the dangerousness of their vision than about the Trump plan.

Critics are already indicting the Trump plan for not meeting all Palestinians demands. That is certainly true, but the plan also does not meet all Israeli demands. It is a compromise, requiring concessions from both sides.

PALESTINIANS SAY 'A THOUSAND NOES' TO TRUMP-NETANYAHU MIDEAST PEACE PLAN

While Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stood beside President Trump and pledged support for the U.S. plan as Trump unveiled it at the White House, there was a notable absence of any Palestinian representative.

Even before the Trump plan was announced, Palestinian leaders said it would be dead on arrival. Upon the release of the plan, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas responded at a news conference: "After the nonsense, we heard today we say a thousand noes to the Deal of the Century. We will not kneel and we will not surrender."

Abbas' rejection was a hyped-up echo of the infamous "three noes," when the Arab world in 1968 rejected any dealings with Israel - even in return of all territories captured by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War, which began when the armies of neighboring Arab states invaded the Jewish state with the goal of

ending its existence.

To no one's surprise, the Hamas terrorist regime that rules the Gaza Strip also angrily denounced the Trump plan Tuesday.

President Trump has given Palestinians four years to consider his peace plan because their reluctance was expected, but at a rate of 1,000 no's a day, Abbas may fill four years or rejection in six months.

The Palestinians are perhaps the only national independence movement in the modern era that has ever rejected a genuine offer of internationally recognized statehood, even if it falls short of all the territory they had sought.

Hundreds of groups seek statehood, and some – like the Kurds – seem to deserve it. But almost none get it. Statehood is by far the exception rather than the norm for separatist groups.

For Palestinian leaders to reject such an offer of statehood from a U.S. administration best poised to deliver it – along with \$50 billion in promised international investment in a new Palestinian state – shows that the Palestinians and their allies still see undermining Israel as their primary goal.

The conduct of the Palestinians must be compared to that of the Jewish leadership in British-ruled Palestine in 1947, as Britain was preparing to end its colonial rule. Jewish leaders were willing to accept a discontinuous, vulnerable state with no part of Jerusalem. This is evidence that those who truly need a state jump on even the most imperfect opportunities.

The Trump administration may suspect that Palestinian officials are unserious about their professed desire for statehood. Other innovative components of the peace plan reflect this.

A principal folly of past efforts to reach an Israeli-Palestinian agreement was that peace itself was not their goal. Instead, they proceeded from a starting assumption that Israel “illegally occupied” territory it captured in the Six-Day War 53 years ago.

Based on the assumption that Israel had no right to land captured in the war, past negotiations worked ineluctably to their goal of forcing Israeli concessions. While the Palestinians rejected generous statehood offers at least four times – holding

out for unrealistic demands like the “right of return” for the descendants of Palestinians who left the newly declared Jewish state in 1948 – they suffered no diplomatic penalty.

The Palestinian Authority pivoted from the Oslo peace accords in 1993 to fomenting a horrific campaign of murderous terrorism in the Second Intifada. It institutionalized terror and anti-Semitism with pay-for-slay – rewarding Palestinian terrorists and their families with large payments for murdering Jews – and criminalizing the sale of land to Jews.

Israel’s complete withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005 was rewarded with the rise of the Hamas terrorist regime, and a permanent drizzle of rockets on Israeli towns. The Oslo promise of a peaceful state in the West Bank and Gaza is long forgotten. Israel is now told to at best satisfy itself with a partial and tenuous peace in the West Bank.

In the meantime, the Palestinians’ gains from the Oslo accords are seen as permanently locked in – including the creation of a Palestinian government that governs almost all Palestinians and enjoys broad international recognition. Israel’s prior territorial offers only become the baseline for further rounds of Israeli concessions, while Israel has no locked-in gains to show.

The Trump plan flips these failed assumptions on their head. If the Palestinians truly want a state to live peacefully with Israel, they must meet some basic conditions indicating their commitment to peace.

These conditions are rudimentary – the end of the Hamas terrorist regime, Palestinian disarmament, an end to pay-for-slay, and a recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. That such conditions are regarded as “unrealistic” underscores how unmoored the “peace process” has become from any quest for peace. Instead, it has become a vehicle for demonizing Israel.

The Trump plan also crucially inverts the paradigm in which the Palestinians keep getting offered more for saying “no.” In Trump’s plan, if the Palestinians do not agree to the peace deal – and do not meet minimal conditions – Israel can proceed to secure its interests without them.

This gives the Palestinians a much-needed incentive to deal. That incentive may be inadequate, but again, that shows that independence may not be the real aim

of Palestinian leaders.

Moreover, the Trump plan ends the failed paradigm where the future of Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) is held hostage indefinitely to Palestinian intransigence.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has already made clear that the U.S. does not regard the Jewish settlements as illegal. Now Israel will finally be able to regularize their status, immediately – a historic victory for Jewish rights to their heartland.

Unlike earlier peace plans, the Trump peace plan is based on justice and realism at the same time. The mass expulsion of people from their homes has never been part of peace agreements with separatist groups, nor is it a decent thing to ask for.

Claims that the plan's release was timed to impact either President Trump's domestic difficulties or Netanyahu's reelection are demonstrably false. Democrats have had Trump under investigation since his first days in office, and Israel has been in an unprecedented series of failed elections for a year, with no clear end in sight.

There is nothing specific about this timing of the release of the peace plan. It is no secret that the U.S. has been working on this plan since near the start of Trump's term. The Trump administration had hoped to release it much earlier, but then the Israeli election drama kicked in.

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Forced to choose between abandoning its efforts and pressing on, the Trump administration eventually chose the latter.

Finally, the Trump plan must be compared to prior diplomatic initiatives, all of which failed to deliver peace and instead mainstreamed Palestinian terrorism. Trump's proposal is unlikely to do worse.

But to avoid falling into past mistakes, the Trump plan and its implementation must make clear that its contemplation of possible Palestinian statehood is not something Palestinian Authority President Abbas can bank on if he rejects everything else.

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For this plan to be fundamentally different, Trump must make clear that Palestinian rejection of the plan means rejecting Palestinian statehood itself.

If Palestinians are unwilling to make needed compromises – as Netanyahu has already agreed to do – the Palestinians must get nothing.

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