

Trump “Peace Plan” Too Extreme Even for Former Right-Wing Israeli Prime Minister

In an extraordinary joint press conference at the United Nations on Tuesday, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert outlined their objections to Donald Trump’s so-called “[peace plan](#)” between Israel and Palestine. The plan would allow Israel to annex large swathes of territory conquered in the 1967 war it has since illegally colonized with Israeli settlers. Trump’s proposal, made without Palestinian participation and unilaterally announced last month, would leave small noncontiguous enclaves of remaining Palestinian territory surrounded by a greatly expanded Israel and allowed only limited autonomy.

Olmert, once a stalwart of Israel’s right-wing Likud Bloc and later prime minister under the only slightly more moderate Kadima Party, has traditionally been hostile to Palestinian national aspirations: He oversaw large-scale expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, attacks on Palestinian civilians and jailing of Palestinian dissidents. The fact that Olmert was criticizing Trump’s plan from the left, therefore, is indicative of just how extreme U.S. policy has become.

Olmert stressed his opposition to announcing a peace plan without consulting the Palestinians. While the Trump administration and members of Congress of both parties have repeatedly denounced Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas in recent years, falsely accusing him of myriad crimes, Olmert argued at the press conference: “He is a man of peace. He is opposed to terror. He is the only partner that we can deal with.”

Both Israeli and U.S. officials were quick to denounce the joint appearance. Trump’s son-in-law, [Jared Kushner](#) — a long-time opponent of Palestinian statehood and supporter of Israeli expansionism who was the principal architect of the Trump plan — said Olmert’s appearance with Abbas was “irrelevant” and “almost pathetic.” President Trump’s recently released [budget proposal](#) would end all U.S. humanitarian aid and other assistance to the Palestinians in retaliation for the Palestinian government’s rejection of the proposal.

[Danny Danon](#), Israel’s ambassador to the United Nations, attacked Olmert for “trying to condemn the U.S., our strongest ally. And I think from a former prime minister we should expect more.” Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) went as far as to say the press conference was “a low point in Israel’s history.”

Last week, more than 100 Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives [signed a letter](#) opposing the Trump proposal on the grounds that it “paves the way for a permanent occupation of the West Bank.” The letter went on to say that Trump’s plan “does not have our support, and the Israeli government must not take it as license to violate international law by annexing all or portions of the West Bank.” Unfortunately, the majority of House Democrats — including most of the leadership — refused to sign it, indicating that Trump’s hardline position has some bipartisan support.

Echoing demands made by previous administrations of both parties, Trump has demanded that the Palestinians not go through the United Nations or an international conference to pursue their aspirations, but only through U.S.-led peace talks, insisting that the United States must be the sole mediator of the conflict while simultaneously serving as the principal military, economic and diplomatic supporter of Israel.

This fundamental contradiction — compounded by the fact that Israel, by far the dominant military and economic power in the region, is also the occupying power with little incentive to end its expansionist agenda without outside pressure — is why Israeli-Palestinian peace has been so elusive. The Palestinian Authority has already recognized Israel, ended its armed struggle, promised strict security guarantees for Israel, accepted the establishment of a state in only 22 percent of historic Palestine, quietly given up on the right of return to Israel for Palestinian refugees, accepted the incorporation of most Israeli settlements into Israel in return for an equivalent amount of Israeli land, and agreed to share Jerusalem as the co-capital of both countries.

Indeed, for over a quarter century, the negotiation position of the Palestinians has been far closer to the international consensus of a viable two-state solution than has the Israeli position, yet both Republicans and Democrats have repeatedly put the blame for the failure of the peace process solely on the Palestinians.

This is why Abbas used the press conference to call for an international peace conference, arguing that the United States “cannot be the sole mediator.” France, which has joined scores of other countries in pushing for such a conference — which the United Nations Security Council had originally called for decades ago — has indicated its willingness to discuss organizing such a meeting, but this has been summarily rejected by Israel and the United States.

Abbas noted how he would “love” to resume the peace talks with Israel “where we left it with you, Mister Olmert, under the umbrella of the international quartet and not on the basis of the plan of annexation, legalizing settlements and destroying the two-state solution.” He also underscored the Palestine Authority’s opposition to violence and terrorism.

The United States, however, has continued to insist that the Palestinian refusal to consider Trump’s proposal — which would solidify an apartheid-like partition of the West Bank — is indicative of an unwillingness to negotiate and a hostility toward peace.

In Israel, meanwhile, [thousands of Israelis rallied](#) in Tel Aviv to denounce the peace plan with leading politicians joining protesters in calling for a viable two-state solution. Unfortunately, with both the ruling Likud party and its leading electoral opposition both endorsing Trump’s plan, there is little hope the Israelis will be willing to make the necessary compromises for peace without U.S. pressure.

As far as the Palestinians are concerned, despite Kushner’s claim that Abbas’s opposition to Trump’s peace plan does not represent the views of the Palestinian people, a [recent poll](#) shows that 94 percent of Palestinians oppose the plan. That same poll also shows that a growing majority of Palestinians no longer support a two-state solution given that unbridled Israeli settlement expansion has made a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel virtually impossible.

And, with the Trump administration and the majority of both houses of Congress supporting Trump’s plan, there is little that can be done in the near term to move a real peace process forward. It’s no wonder that many international observers are seriously questioning whether a viable two-state solution will ever be a reality.

[Trump’s Israel-Palestine “Peace” Plan Violates International Law](#)

Trump’s plan seeks to formalize the apartheid-like conditions shaped by the policies of previous U.S. administrations. By [Stephen Zunes](#) , *[Truthout January 29, 2020](#)*