

What's in Trump's 'Deal of the Century'? The Answers Are in Plain Sight

The White House's peace plan is said to be days away. Meanwhile, Israel is getting a US nod as it carries on seizing Palestinian land

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There are mounting signals that Donald Trump's much-delayed Middle East peace plan - billed as the "deal of the century" - is about to be unveiled.

Even though Trump's officials have given away nothing publicly, the plan's contours are already evident, according to analysts.

They note that Israel has already started implementing the deal - entrenching "apartheid" rule over Palestinians - while Washington has spent the past six months dragging its heels on publishing the document.

"Netanyahu has simply got on with deepening his hold on the West Bank and East Jerusalem - and he knows the Americans aren't going to stand in his way," said Michel Warschawski, an Israeli analyst and head of the Alternative Information Centre in Jerusalem.

"He will be given free rein to do what he likes, whether they publish the plan or, in the end, it never sees the light of day," he told Middle East Eye.

Eran Etzion, a former Israeli foreign ministry official, agreed:

"Israel has a much freer hand than it did in the past. It feels confident enough to continue its existing policies, knowing Trump won't stand in the way."

Netanyahu 'the winner'

According to the [latest reports](#), the Americans may present their plan within days, soon after the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Yossi Alpher, a former aide to Ehud Barak during his premiership in the late 90s, said it was clear Netanyahu was being "kept in the loop" by Trump officials. He told MEE:

"He is being apprised of what is coming. There won't be any surprises for him."

Analysts are agreed that Netanyahu will emerge the winner from any Trump initiative.

Yossi Beilin, a former Israeli politician who was a pivotal figure in the Oslo peace process of the early 90s, said Netanyahu would cynically manipulate the plan to his advantage.

“He knows the Palestinians will not accept the terms they are being offered,” he told MEE. “So he can appear reasonable and agree to it – even if there are things he is unhappy with – knowing that the Palestinians will reject it and then be blamed for its failure.”

Alpher agreed.

“If the plan is rejected, Trump will say he did his best, he offered the parties the greatest deal ever, and that they must now be left to settle the issues on their own.”

He added that the only obstacle to Washington presenting the plan were fears about Abbas’s waning health. Trump’s team might then prefer to shelve it.

Even then, he said, Netanyahu would profit.

“He can then continue with what he’s been doing for the past 10 years. He will expand the settlements, and suppress the rights of Israelis who oppose him. He will move Israel towards a situation of apartheid.”

Fragments of land

In an early effort to win Trump’s favour, reported by MEE a year ago, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas [proposed a land swap](#) ceding 6.5 percent of the occupied territories to Israel. That was more than three times what had been accepted by the Palestinians in previous peace talks.

But the Palestinians appear to have lost the battle and are now braced for the worst. Abbas [has derided](#) the plan as “the slap of the century”, and has said he will not commit “treason” by agreeing to it.

According to Palestinian officials, they are likely to be offered provisional borders over fragments of land comprising about half the occupied territories – or just 11 percent of what was recognised as Palestine under the British mandate.

The Palestinian areas would be demilitarised, and Israel [would have control](#) over the borders and airspace.

Israel and the Palestinians would then be left to “negotiate” over the status of Israel’s illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, with Trump likely to back Netanyahu to the hilt, according to the analysts.

It is widely assumed that the Americans have rejected any principle of a right of return for Palestinian refugees, either to Israel or to the areas of the occupied territories that Israel wins US approval to seize.

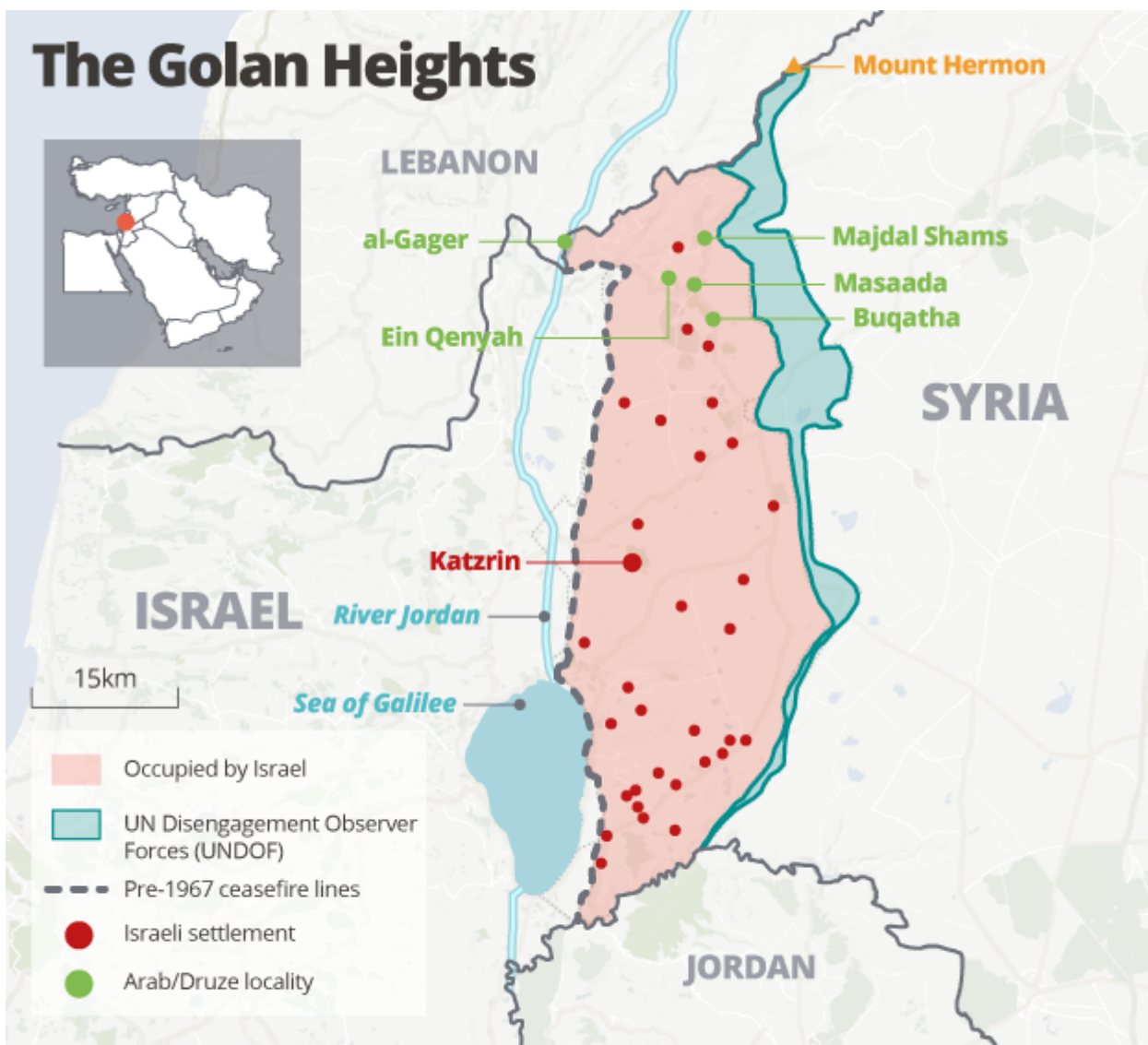
Gaza and Golan windfalls

The US embassy's move to Jerusalem last month appears to signal that the Trump administration will recognise all of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. That would deny Palestinians East Jerusalem, long assumed to be the capital of any future Palestinian state.

And separate reports this month suggest that the announcement of the peace plan may be timed to coincide with new measures for Gaza and the Golan Heights. There have been rumours for several years that Washington and Israel have been pressuring Cairo to let Palestinians in Gaza settle in Sinai.

According to [Israeli reports](#), Washington may be close to unveiling a scheme that would weaken the border between Gaza and Egypt, and allow Palestinians to work and maybe live in northern Sinai.

The aim would be to gradually shift responsibility for the enclave [away from Israel on to Egypt](#) and further undermine prospects for a Palestinian state in historic Palestine.



Source: Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Pew Research Center study, UNDOF.org

And in a separate move that would complete Netanyahu's windfall, an Israeli government minister [claimed late last month](#) that the Trump administration may be ready to recognise Israeli sovereignty over the Golan.

The Heights were seized by Israel from Syria during the 1967 war and annexed in violation of international law in 1981.

No longer 'occupied'

A [Jerusalem Post report](#) last month suggested that the White House document would be unlikely to include a commitment to a "two-state solution", reflecting previous comments from Trump.

That would free Israel's hand to seize areas of the West Bank it has colonised with its ever-expanding settlements.

Noticeably, the [latest annual report](#) from the US State Department on the human rights situation by country, published in April, [drops for the first time](#) the term "occupied Palestinian territories", implying that the Trump team no longer views much of the West Bank as under occupation.

Netanyahu [told](#) a recent meeting of his Likud faction:

"Our successes are still to come. Our policies are not based on weakness. They are not based on concessions that will endanger us."

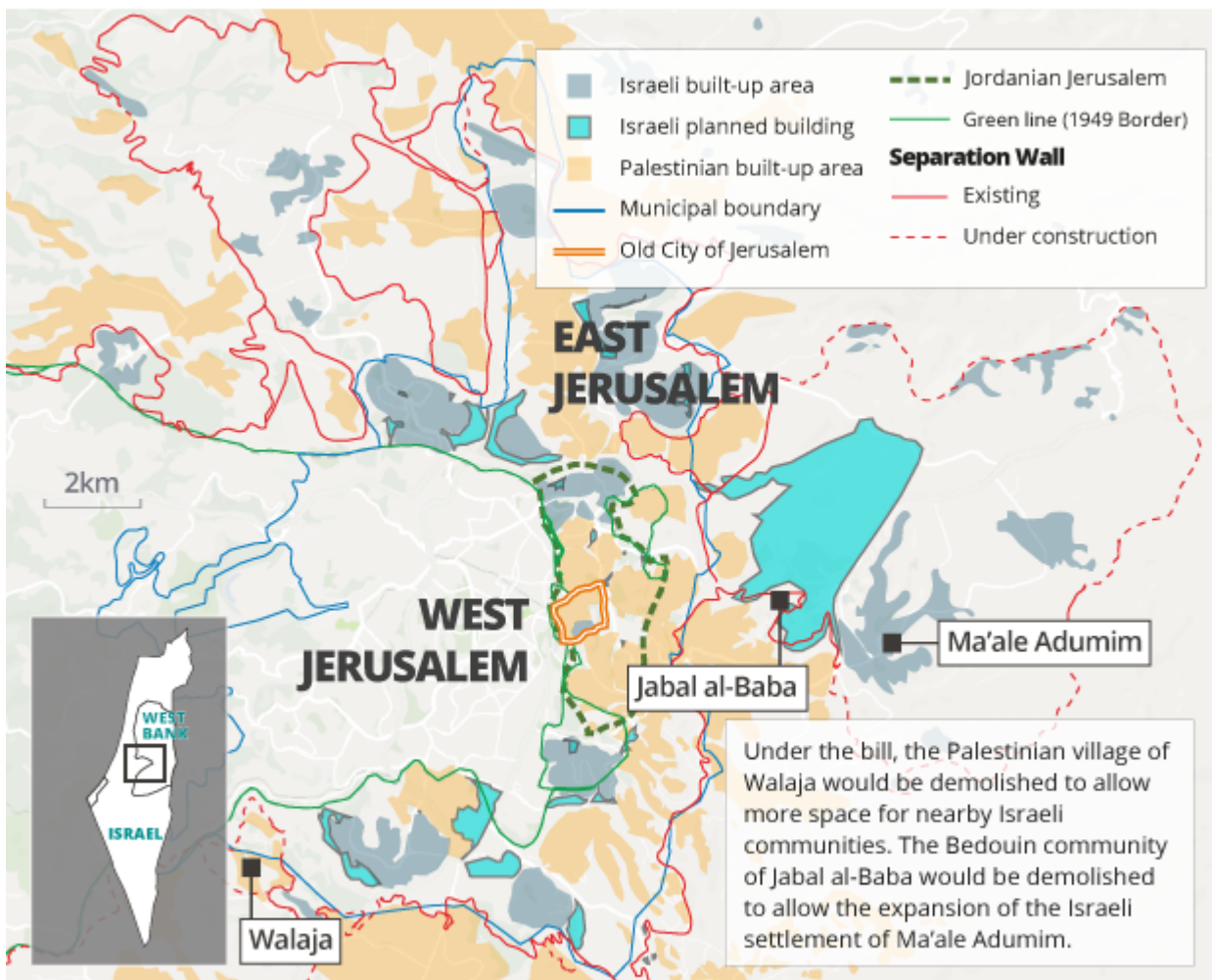
So given Israel's recent moves, what can we infer about the likely terms of Trump's peace plan?

1. Gerrymandering Jerusalem

The most sensitive of the final-status issues is Jerusalem, which includes the incendiary Muslim holy site of al-Aqsa. Trump appears to have effectively recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital by relocating the US embassy there last month.

The embassy move is likely to be interpreted by Netanyahu as a retroactive seal of approval from the US for a series of Israeli measures over recent months designed to engineer a Greater Jewish Jerusalem.

The Greater Jerusalem Bill



Source : Ir Amim



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The main thrust are [two legislative proposals](#) to gerrymander the city's boundaries and its population to create an unassailable Jewish majority. Both have been put on hold by Netanyahu until the announcement of the peace plan.

The first - called the Greater Jerusalem Bill - is intended to annex several large Jewish settlements close by in the occupied West Bank to the Jerusalem municipality. Overnight that would transform some 150,000 West Bank settlers into Jerusalem residents, as well as effectively annexing their lands to Israel.

In a sign of the impatience of members of Netanyahu's cabinet to press on with such a move, the bill is due to come up for consideration again on Sunday.

A separate bill would strip residency in the city from some 100,000 Palestinians who are on the "wrong side" of a wall Israel began building through Jerusalem 15 years ago. Those Palestinians will be all but barred from Jerusalem and assigned to a separate council.

In addition, Israel has intensified harsh measures against Palestinians still inside East Jerusalem, including night arrests, house demolitions, the closing down of businesses, the creation of "national parks" in Palestinian neighbourhoods, and the denial of basic services.

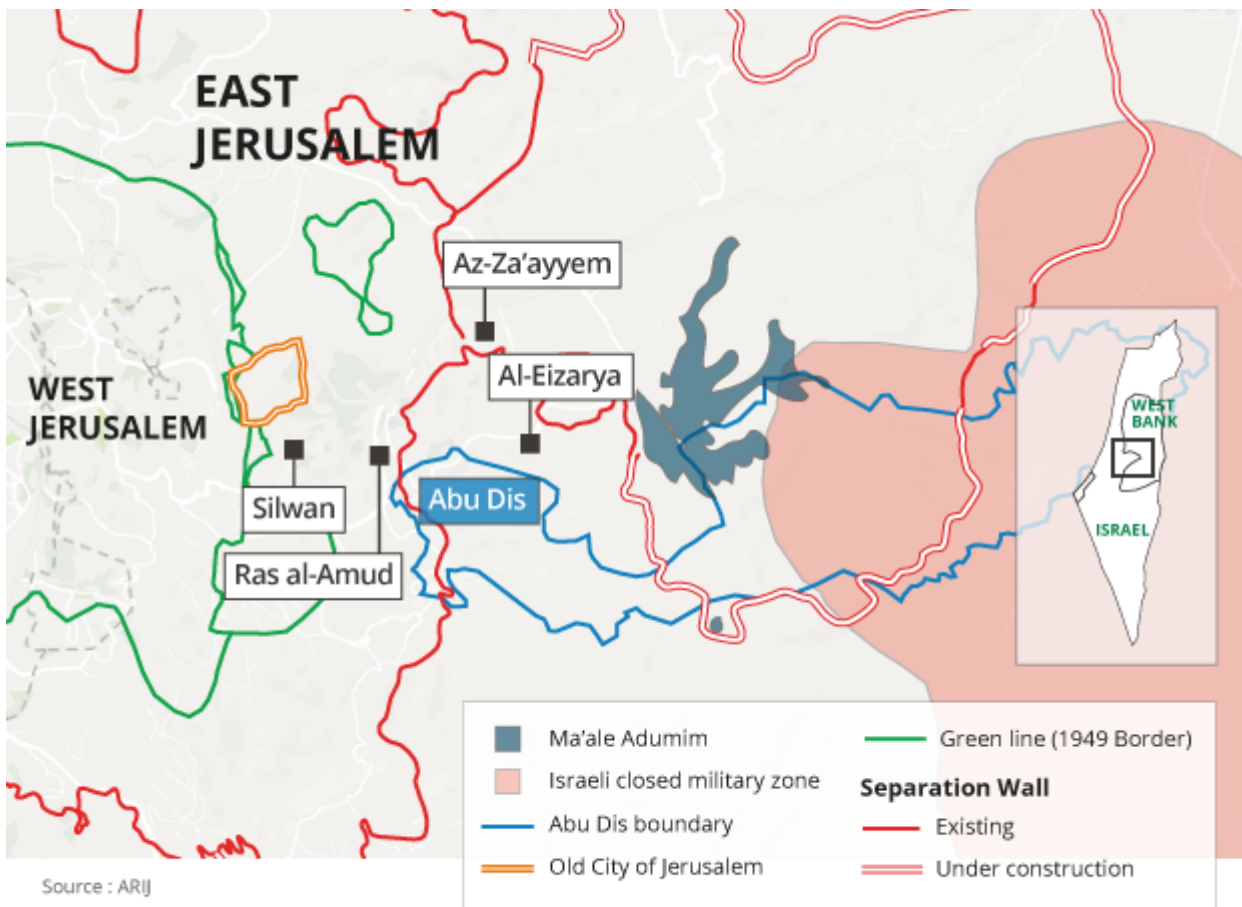
The barely veiled aim is to encourage residents to relocate outside the wall.

Experts [have noted](#) too that Palestinian schools inside the wall are being pressured to adopt the Israeli curriculum to erode a Palestinian identity among pupils.

2. Abu Dis: a Palestinian capital?

With Jerusalem as Israel's exclusive capital, Trump's team is reported to be seeking a face-saving alternative location for a future Palestinian "capital" outside Jerusalem's municipal borders.

According to rumours, they have selected the town of Abu Dis, 4km east of Jerusalem and cut off from the city by Israel's wall more than a decade ago.



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The Abu Dis plan is not new. At the end of the 90s, the US administration of Bill Clinton proposed renaming Abu Dis "al-Quds" - Arabic for "the Holy", the traditional name of Jerusalem because of its holy places. That was seen as a prelude to designating it the future capital of a Palestinian state.

Reports about the elevation of Abu Dis in the new peace plan have been circulating since late last year. In January, Abbas [rejected](#) the idea outright.

Only last month Yair Lapid, leader of Israel's centre-right Yesh Atid party, [highlighted reports](#) about the imminent change of Abu Dis's status in comments directed at Netanyahu.

Abu Dis is a densely populated village home to 13,000 Palestinians. In practice, it is all but

impossible to imagine how it could function meaningfully as the capital of a Palestinian state – something that makes it an attractive proposition for most of Netanyahu’s coalition.

Currently, most of Abu Dis’s lands are under Israeli control, and it is hemmed in by the wall and Jewish settlements, including the 40,000 inhabitants of Maale Adumim.

Several government ministers have made Israel’s annexation of Maale Adumim a priority. Netanyahu has delayed such a move, again citing the need to wait for the announcement of the Trump peace plan.

Beilin said it was mistakenly believed that he and Abbas agreed on Abu Dis as a Palestinian capital back in the 90s.

“It wasn’t credible as an idea then, and the map looks very different now,” he said. “The Palestinian capital has to be in East Jerusalem. Nothing else will work.”

3. Access to al-Aqsa

There has also been talk of a plan to create a narrow land corridor from Abu Dis to the al-Aqsa mosque, so Palestinians can reach it to pray.

However, Israel has been [allowing ever larger numbers of settlers](#) into al-Aqsa, which is reputedly built over two long-destroyed Jewish temples.

Meanwhile, Israel has been tightly restricting access to the site for most Palestinians. There have been long-standing Palestinian fears that Israel is seeking to engineer a situation where it can impose its sovereignty over the mosque.

David Friedman, Trump’s ambassador to Israel and a benefactor to the settlements, only heightened such fears last month when [he was pictured](#) apparently accepting a photo doctored by religious settlers that showed al-Aqsa mosque replaced by a new Jewish temple.

4. Jordan Valley

Under the Oslo accords, some 62 percent of the occupied West Bank was classified as Area C, under temporary Israeli control. It includes much of the Palestinians’ best agricultural land and would be the heartland of any future Palestinian state.

Israel never carried out the withdrawals from Area C intended in the Oslo process. Instead, it has been accelerating the expansion of illegal Jewish settlements there, and making life as hard as possible for Palestinians to force them into the confines of the more densely populated Areas A and B.

The Trump plan is reported to offer recognition of provisional Palestinian borders on about half of the West Bank – effectively awarding most of Area C to Israel. Much of that land will be in the Jordan Valley, the long spine of the West Bank that Israel has been colonising for decades.

Last December, as the Trump plan took shape, Israel [announced](#) a massive programme of settlement expansion in the Jordan Valley, designed to more than double the settler

population there. Three new settlements will be the first to be built in the valley in nearly 30 years.

At the same time, Israel has lately been intensifying the harassment of the ever-shrinking Palestinian population in the Jordan Valley, as well as other parts of Area C.

In addition to denying Palestinians access to 85 percent of the Valley, Israel has [declared military firing zones](#) over nearly half of the area. That has justified the regular eviction of families on the pretext of ensuring their safety.

Israel has also been [developing accelerated procedures](#) to demolish Palestinian homes in the Jordan Valley.

5. The rest of Area C

Israel has been speeding up efforts to expand the settlements in other parts of Area C. On 30 May, it [announced](#) nearly 2,000 new homes, the great majority of them in isolated settlements that it was previously assumed would be dismantled in any peace deal.

Additionally, Israel has been [quietly preparing](#) to “legalise” what are termed “outposts” – settlements, usually built on private Palestinian land, that violate a “no new settlements” agreement with the US dating from the 90s.

At the same time, Israel has been destroying Palestinian communities in Area C, especially those that stand in the way of efforts to create territorial continuity between large settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

Late last month, France objected after Israel’s supreme court approved a plan to demolish the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar, next to Maale Adumim. The families are supposed to be moved to a garbage dump in Abu Dis.

The French statement [warned](#) that Israeli actions were threatening “a zone of strategic importance to the two-state solution and the contiguity of a future Palestinian state”.

In its place, it was [recently revealed](#), Israel is planning to build a new settlement neighbourhood called Nofei Bereishit.

In another sign of mounting international concern, some 70 Democratic members of the US Congress appealed last month to Netanyahu to stop the destruction of the Palestinian community of Sussiya, between the Gush Etzion settlements and Jerusalem.

US lawmakers [expressed concern](#) that the move was designed to “jeopardise the prospects for a two-state solution”.

6. Gaza and Sinai

It is becoming hard for the Trump administration and Israel to ignore the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza – one Israel helped to engineer with an 11-year blockade and intermittent military attacks. The United Nations warned some time ago that Gaza would soon be “uninhabitable”.

Seeking a solution, the White House hosted 19 countries at a meeting in March to consider

the situation in Gaza. The PA [boycotted](#) the meeting.



At the time, [Arab media reported](#) that the Trump peace plan might include a commitment from Egypt to free up northern Sinai for a future Palestinian state. According to a Hamas official, Cairo offered reassurances that it was opposed to “settling Palestinians in Sinai”.

But [a report in Haaretz](#) has revived concerns that the White House may try to achieve a similar end by other means, by launching a Gaza initiative to coincide with the peace plan.

The paper noted that the Trump team had picked up proposals from an Israeli general, Yoav

Mordechai, who participated in the White House meeting in March.

A reported initial stage would see Palestinians from Gaza recruited to work on \$1.5bn worth of long-term projects in northern Sinai, funded by the international community. The projects would include an industrial zone, a desalination plant and a power station.

Egyptian opposition to such an initiative is reported to be weakening, presumably in the face of strenuous pressure from Washington and Arab allies.

Palestinian protests

The Palestinians are doing their best to try to halt the peace plan in its tracks. They are currently boycotting the Trump administration to show their displeasure.

Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki [called last month](#) on Arab states to recall their ambassadors from the United States in protest.

And an emergency meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation [has proposed](#) that an international peacekeeping force, modelled those used in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 90s, be deployed to protect Palestinians.

In another sign of anger at the Trump initiative, the Palestinians defied the US by submitting a referral for the International Criminal Court at the Hague to investigate Israel for war crimes last month.

Etzion, the former Israeli foreign ministry official, however, warned that a turning point could be on the horizon.

“A Palestinian implosion is coming and that could change the situation in unexpected ways,” he told MEE. “The question is which implosion comes first: the humanitarian catastrophe about to engulf Gaza, or the political vacuum created when Abbas leaves.”

Arab pressure

Nonetheless, the Palestinians are facing huge pressure to give in to the peace plan.

The Trump administration has already cut funding to the UN refugee agency, UNRWA, which cares for more than two million refugees in the occupied territories. It is also poised to pull more than \$200m of funding to the Palestinian Authority this summer.

Trump has also sought to recruit the Arab states to lean on Abbas. According to reports, the Palestinian leader [was presented](#) with a 35-page document originating from the Americans when he visited Saudi Arabia last November, and told to accept it or resign.

In recent years the Saudis have increased their aid to the Palestinian Authority, giving them greater leverage over the Palestinian leader.

In exchange for the Arab states acceding to Trump’s plan, Washington appears to be rolling out a more draconian policy towards Iran to limit its influence in the region.

The Arab states understand that they need to first defuse the Palestinian issue before they

can be seen to coordinate closely with Israel and the US in dealing with Tehran.

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Jonathan Cook won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His books include "Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East" (Pluto Press) and "Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair" (Zed Books). His website is www.jonathan-cook.net. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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