

Implications of the US Peace Plan on the Future of Jerusalem

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Yesterday, the long anticipated US Peace Plan was formally released and underscored the myriad of concerns associated with it. The plan includes neither an element of negotiation nor an agreement between two parties and therefore cannot be considered a peace plan. The stark congruence between the plan and the settler rightwing agenda indicates the vast gap between the plan and a fair and viable solution which recognizes the demands and rights of both Israelis and Palestinians alike. Even if the plan pays lip service to a configuration of a two-state solution, the conditions stipulated render it no less than futile and unviable. In Jerusalem in particular, where two peoples share a common urban space with immense historical, political and religious significance for both sides, unilateral moves that do not take into account the mutual physical and symbolic attachments to the city, will only generate more conflict and hostility and ultimately jeopardize an agreed resolution.

Below are referenced key points in the US Peace Plan concerning Jerusalem and their projected impact on the city's future. Regardless of its viability, the plan's content underpins the notion that an advanced understanding has been reached between the Israeli government and the Trump administration concerning far-reaching unilateral measures. According to Ir Amim's analysis as illustrated in [our recent policy paper](#), the plan largely reflects extensive moves that are already being implemented on the ground to strengthen Israel's hold on East Jerusalem and to carry out annexation steps towards "Greater Jerusalem." It is important to note that the policy paper was drafted just prior to publication of the US peace plan, with an emphasis on the actual developments on the ground and their relation to the accumulated information concerning the plan prior to its formal release. With the plan's official unveiling, the resemblance between the plan's outline and the major facts on the ground are even more evident. It is intended to be used as a reference. Concerning the plan itself and its provisions on Jerusalem and their corresponding implications, see below.

Key Points Concerning Jerusalem in the US Peace Plan

Sovereignty

The US peace plan explicitly affirms Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem in its entirety and avows that it will remain undivided, completely undermining the broadly agreed framework of two states with two capitals in Jerusalem.

Borders and Capitals

The plan posits that the Separation Barrier in the Jerusalem area will remain in place and serve as the border of the city and between the two alleged capitals, with the following implications:

- The eight East Jerusalem Palestinian neighborhoods concentrated in two main areas (Kufr Aqab-Semiramis area and the Shuafat refugee camp area) which were left beyond the Separation Barrier, would be formally uprooted from the city (see [linked map](#)). These neighborhoods are home to over 1/3 of the Palestinian population- between 120,000-140,000 permanent residents- who were forced to migrate there due to the severe suppression on Palestinian building within the city and the constant threat of permanent residency revocations in the event of living outside the municipal borders. Israeli authorities have systemically neglected these neighborhoods, abdicating all responsibility for providing basic municipal services and leaving the residents under constant apprehension that Israel intends to ultimately sever the neighborhoods off entirely from Jerusalem. It should be noted

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that the concept of formally detaching these neighborhoods from Jerusalem has appeared in recent years in Israeli legislative proposals and government plans.

- According to the plan, a theoretical Palestinian capital would be established in the areas beyond the barrier, which would include Kufr Aqab, the Shuafat refugee camp area, as well as Abu Dis (see [linked map](#)). Abu Dis has repeatedly appeared in various Israeli proposals as a substitute outside of Jerusalem for a Palestinian capital and consistently rejected by the Palestinians. It is likewise important to note there is no territorial contiguity between the two areas beyond the barrier and Abu Dis, rendering it an even more artificial construct.
- The current and planned route of the Separation Barrier marks the three blocs of settlements around Jerusalem – Gush Etzion, Ma’aleh Adumim, and Givat Ze’ev, as an integral part of “Greater Jerusalem.” Attempts to annex these three blocs of settlements have been reflected in [legislative proposals, government plans and political statements](#) from over the last few years. The “Greater Jerusalem” areas significantly plunge deep into the West Bank, particularly in the Maaleh Adumim/E-1 bloc, which has been considered an international red line. Likewise, the massive road infrastructure project being carried out in the northeast of Jerusalem indicates the potential inclusion of a fourth bloc (Adam-Kokhav Ya’akov-Psagot) as a possible part of the “Greater Jerusalem” concept. See Ir Amim’s latest policy paper ([link above](#)) for more details.

Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif

Although the plan avers to uphold the status quo on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, it contains blatant contradictions which constitute a flagrant breach to the status quo. It states that “people of every faith should be permitted to pray on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, in a manner that is fully respectful to their religion, taking into account the times of each religion’s prayers and holidays, as well as other religious factors.” Enshrined in peace agreements with Jordan and upheld since 1967, the status quo confers only Muslims with worship rights, while all others are visitors. In the words of Prime Minister Netanyahu himself in October 2015, “Muslims pray at the Temple Mount, non-Muslims visit it.” Permitting people of all faiths to pray on the Mount marks a dramatic shift in the longstanding policy concerning worship rights on the Holy Esplanade, and could likewise imply the possibility of a (temporary or permanent) division of worship space and time. Incidents along these lines have occurred sporadically over the past few years and were a source of mounting friction (*see below*). It is worth noting that such changes have been one of the primary goals of the [Temple Movements](#) – radical Jewish activists committed to overturning the status quo and asserting Jewish sovereignty over the site, who are often supported by rightwing government ministers.

Civil Status

The plan indicates that the Palestinian residents of Jerusalem located on the Israeli side of the Separation Barrier would be given the choice to a. become citizens of the State of Israel b. become citizens of the State of Palestine or c. retain status as permanent residents in Israel. Based on the plan, the 120,000-140,000 East Jerusalem Palestinian residents, who reside in the neighborhoods beyond the barrier, would presumably lose their residency status in the event they remain in these areas. The route of the Separation Barrier was initially designed to create new demographic and territorial facts on the ground. It is worth noting that since 1967, Palestinian residents of Jerusalem have been given the option to apply for Israeli citizenship. Due to the growing pressures on residency status, thousands of Palestinian residents have applied for citizenship in recent years, yet few applications have been approved.

Jerusalem’s Holy Sites

The plan calls to safeguard Jerusalem’s religious and holy sites and ensure freedom of access for worshippers of all faiths. It subsequently lists various holy sites in Jerusalem. Save for the Haram al-Sharif and a general reference to Muslim holy shrines, there is no

other inclusion of sacred Muslim sites on the list, while at the same time it includes a significant number of Jewish and Christian sites. Among the Jewish sites listed, there are various archeological sites which Israel has never before officially regarded or recognized as holy. It should be noted that these sites are located in and around Silwan and constitute the locus of the Elad settler organization's touristic settlement operations in the area.

Implications

- **While not explicitly cited in the plan, E-1 and Givat Hamatos are two areas which require immediate attention:**

Givat Hamatos: Recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the entirety of Jerusalem presumably paves the way for construction in Givat Hamatos, in which tenders could be published at any time. As [Ir Amim previously reported](#), there has been mounting pressure from rightwing groups over the past few weeks to initiate construction in Givat Hamatos. The US peace plan along with the upcoming Israeli election will only serve to embolden these efforts.

E-1: References to annexation of the majority of West Bank settlements is liable to accelerate attempts to build and/or annex the E-1 area. It is important to note that E-1 was registered by Israel in the 1990s as part of the Maaleh Adumim municipal area and therefore any construction within this area could be interpreted by Israel as building within an existing settlement.

- **In light of the plan's provision for all religions to receive prayer rights on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, a blatant violation of the status quo, more instances of Jewish prayer on the Mount are anticipated.** Likewise, incidents, such as when [Jews were granted unprecedented access to the compound on Eid al-Adha to observe Tisha B'Av](#) in August 2019, are expected to become more frequent. Tensions surrounding the status quo on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif have been a major source of clashes over the past few years. The collective identity of the Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem is centered on their role as guardians of Haram al-Sharif (Al Aqsa). They are therefore likely to view Trump's recognition of Israeli sovereignty over East Jerusalem as a direct threat to this very role. This threat is coupled by anticipated additional attempts to challenge the status quo by the Temple Movements, bolstered by the US peace plan's implied breach of the status quo. Such moves are liable to further inflame frictions and tensions on the Mount.
- **The US plan significantly reflects Israeli efforts in recent years to officially uproot the neighborhoods beyond the barrier from Jerusalem.** This is liable to cause a wave of Palestinian residents back into the core of East Jerusalem, increasing the already existing burden on the massive housing shortage and failing infrastructure and leading to even greater chaos within the Palestinian neighborhoods on both sides of the barrier. Likewise, it is possible there will be an increase in requests for Israeli citizenship particularly among Palestinian residents living beyond the barrier in order to secure their status in the city.
- **State-sponsored settlement campaigns in the Old City Basin, including settler-initiated evictions of Palestinians, takeovers of their homes, and touristic initiatives are expected to accelerate.** Over the past year, there have been numerous advancements along the [settlement ring around the old city](#), including approval of the controversial cable car, while in this month alone, the [Jerusalem Magistrate's Court ruled to evict two extended families from Batan al-Hawa](#) on behalf of the Ateret Cohanim settler organization.