



PERSPECTIVES

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Trump Peace Plan Unlikely to Lead to Major Escalation, But IDF Is Taking Precautions

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: While few in Israel expect a major escalation to follow Trump's announcement of the "Deal of the Century", the IDF is conducting ongoing situation assessments to keep its finger on the pulse. The Israeli defense establishment is preparing to study the details of the proposal closely to see what conclusions can be drawn in terms of potential security ramifications.

As the region absorbs the details of the Trump administration's peace plan to tackle the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the IDF took the preemptive step on Tuesday of moving an infantry battalion to the Jordan Valley, giving the military an added layer of flexibility to deal with a range of possible scenarios.

The IDF's preparations also include stepped-up intelligence gathering in the West Bank and dialogue with a variety of influential figures in the area. IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi completed a tour of the West Bank on Tuesday afternoon together with Defense Minister Naftali Bennett.

Col. (res.) Moshe Elad, one of the founders of the security coordination between the IDF and the Palestinian Authority, said he doubted any significant level of popular violence was about to be ignited, and that sporadic demonstrations are more likely.

"I believe the Palestinian public of 2020 is not the same as it was during the first intifada in 1987, and certainly not like it was in subsequent escalations," said Elad, a lecturer at Western Galilee College. "The Palestinians are still angry at the State of Israel, but they're also looking at Gaza; they see the conditions there, and they do not want to reach that. The conditions for them are good, and they fear closures and disorder disrupting their lives."

As a result, Elad said, the most likely scenario is demonstrations and localized disruptions that do not develop into massive eruptions of violence.

Palestinian anger at the proposal will nevertheless stretch across the board. "They will never agree to this," Elad said. "They perceive it as a very pro-Israeli proposal."

The Palestinian leadership in the West Bank had assumed future talks would resume where past talks—such as the Abbas-Olmert negotiations or the 2000 Barak-Clinton proposals—left off. They expected, in other words, that talks would be based on the idea of establishing a state roughly on the 1967 Green Line borders with eastern Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital, with a symbolic return of refugees and Israel receiving three main settlement blocs.

The far more limited vision of a Palestinian state contained in the Trump proposal contains none of the basic components envisioned by the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian public. "None of that is here," Elad said. "They will say that this is not a state, that they have no space, and that there is nothing to talk about."

Elad noted that from 1994 onward, the Palestinians have nurtured a dream of a state on the 1967 borders with no settlements within it. That vision no longer has any proponents in the Israeli mainstream, he said, adding, "the Palestinians are not prepared for the new proposal."

From a practical perspective, the gap between Israel and the Palestinians is so wide that "Trump had no choice but to make an unequivocal decision to launch this proposal and to say, 'Take it or leave it.'" But despite the anger the proposal has provoked, Elad believes "there won't be a third intifada."

In the longer-term assessment, the Palestinian population lacks the energy to engage in a major confrontation with Israel, according to Elad. "They will probably go along with what their leaders decide."

One possible scenario is this: if PA head Mahmoud Abbas concludes that Trump will remain in office for a second term, he can order Fatah to disband the PA "and return the keys to Israel." A second possibility, Elad said, is that they will remain but will cut off all contact and coordination with Israel.

Much of what the Palestinian leadership does depends on the response at the street level in the West Bank, he added. "If they receive public backing, the Palestinian leadership will go all the way [i.e., disbanding the PA]. If the public does not respond fiercely, Abbas could also resign. The main thing he wants to avoid is being seen as a traitor. What Yasser Arafat rejected—recognition of Israel as a Jewish state—he, too, will reject."

From a strictly security perspective, the unveiling of the plan will not have a significant effect on the ground, argued Elad, though he did caution that Hamas could take advantage of the situation to strengthen its position.

This is an edited version of an [article](#) published by JNS on January 28, 2020.

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