

Palestinian refugees reject US Mideast policy as Beirut skips meeting

Wed, 2019-06-26 01:04

BEIRUT: Palestinian refugees in Lebanese camps took to the streets on Tuesday to reject the so-called US “deal of the century,” burning US and Israeli flags and demanding the right to return, following the Bahrain workshop on the Palestinian issue.

Lebanon did not officially participate in the workshop despite hosting almost 200,000 Palestinian refugees, and Lebanese political and religious figures stressed their “rejection” of the policy of resettlement.

The chairman of the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee, Dr. Hassan Mneimneh, told Arab News: “The US administration’s insistence on its respect for the Lebanese constitution, which rejects the resettlement of the Palestinians, has changed now in the light of statements made by Jared Kushner, senior advisor to US President Donald Trump, asserting that the Palestinians should stay in the host countries or seek a third country. This is a resettlement project.

“If this continues and the Americans succeed in imposing what they plan as a fait accompli, things will become worrying. We have seen what happened over sanctions on Iran – countries that refused to impose them were subjected to economic pressure.

“Lebanon cannot resettle the Palestinians on its land. This is a firm, official and popular position.”

BACKGROUND

The Grand Mufti of Lebanon, Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian, said that ‘Palestine is not a commodity that is sold and bought.’

Mneimneh said Lebanon would struggle to help Palestinians if more pressure was applied to the UN’s Relief and Works Agency for Palestinians in the Near East (UNRWA). The Trump administration suspended its share of the agency’s annual funding, now around \$370 million, last year, and there are suggestions the US could veto UNRWA’s mandate, which will be resubmitted to the UN General Assembly in September. “This is a very dangerous sign, especially for Lebanon. The Lebanese authorities should look into all future possibilities in case things get worse,” Mneimneh added.

Protesters in the Ain Al-Hilweh camp, the largest in Lebanon, burned flags and tires in front of the Palestinian Joint Force headquarters to express their anger.

“The Palestinian issue is not for sale, and we will resist any attempt to liquidate it. We stand behind the Palestinian leadership headed by President Mahmoud Abbas,” said Maher Shabayta, secretary of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Fatah Movement in Sidon.

“We will resist any capitulation suggested by the US administration,” said Abu Hussein Hamdan, a political relations official of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

In Tyre, UNRWA schools were closed and Palestinian flags and banners condemning the “deal of the century” and the Bahrain workshop were raised.

Abdulmajid Awad, a Hamas official in Tyre, said: “The meeting in Manama is aimed at eliminating the Palestinian national cause and we are still committed to the right of return. Resistance must continue in all its forms.”

The Grand Mufti of Lebanon, Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian, said: “Palestine is not a commodity that is sold and bought. It is an issue that will be solved by the return of Palestinian people to land occupied by a brutal enemy. We say to whoever tries to lure our Arab countries with billions of dollars: Arab land, especially the land of blessed Palestine, is priceless and we will not accept resettlement.

“No one should dream that the Palestinians in the diaspora will be resettled – they will return to the Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.”

The Beirut Bar Association (BBA) witnessed a rally of dozens of lawyers after they walked out of court hearings to protest. “The Manama workshop aims to eliminate the Palestinian issue, and the right of return of the refugees to their country,” said Jamil Qambris, secretary of the BBA.

The Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee is a Lebanese governmental advisory body, dealing with the governance of Palestinian refugees.

A census conducted by the Lebanese and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in 2017 showed that over 78,000 Palestinian refugees based in the country live in camps.



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Kushner urges Palestinians to take the “Opportunity of the Century” Why Palestine needs help

[UN chief says important Mideast peace efforts realize two-state vision](#)

Wed, 2019-06-26 00:56

NEW YORK: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Tuesday it was important “to pursue peace efforts to realize the vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.”

Guterres was speaking at a pledging conference in New York for the UN agency that helps Palestinian refugees as President Donald Trump’s administration launched in Bahrain a \$50 billion economic formula for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

It is not clear whether the Trump administration plans to abandon the “two-state solution,” which involves creation of an independent Palestinian state living side by side with Israel. The Trump administration has consistently refused to commit to it, keeping the political stage of its peace plan a secret.

At the pledging conference in New York, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) – which helps 5 million registered Palestinian refugees across Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank and Gaza – raised some \$110 million to help continue its operations, UNRWA chief Pierre Krahenbuhl said.

He told reporters that there was no clash between the UNRWA pledging event and the US-organized conference in Bahrain because “we deal with the realities of today.”

Most of the refugees UNRWA helps are descendants of about 700,000 Palestinians who were driven out of their homes or fled fighting in the 1948 war that led to Israel’s creation and claim a right of return to the lands they left.

Hatem Hamdouna, a 14-year-old student from Gaza and member of the UNRWA student Parliament, addressed ambassadors and diplomats at the pledging conference in New York on Tuesday.

“Since I was born, I experienced three wars,” he said. “However, during the darkest times UNRWA education was my only hope for a better future ... UNRWA education is just like oxygen, it keeps us alive.”

The US – formerly UNRWA’s largest donor, halted its funding to the agency in 2018, deeming its fiscal practices “irredeemably flawed” and stoking tensions between the Palestinians and the Trump administration.

UNRWA was able to fill the gap of several hundred million dollars and Krahenbuhl said that, while each year is a struggle, he was encouraged that donor momentum had not been lost.

UNRWA’s mandate is due to come up for renewal later this year in the General Assembly, where support for the agency has been traditionally strong and the United States would likely face an uphill battle to change or cancel the operation.

“We actually have probably the best support base in overall political terms that we’ve ever had in the history of this institution,” Krahenbuhl said.



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In Bahrain, US to launch economic part of Mideast peace plan amid skepticism
Israel to attend US Mideast peace conference: minister

[Kushner: Trump wants fair deal for Palestinians](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-06-25 01:13

MANAMA, Bahrain: Donald Trump wants a fair deal for Palestinians, the US president's adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner said on the eve of the launch in Bahrain of the White House's \$50 billion "peace for prosperity" plan.

The Palestinians are missing an opportunity to participate in the Middle East

peace process by boycotting the Bahrain conference, Kushner said. "This is a strong package that has been put together. Fighting it instead of embracing it, I think, is a strategic mistake."

The plan proposes a global investment fund for Palestine and neighboring Arab states, and a \$5 billion transport corridor between the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinian leaders have rejected it, but Kushner said their criticism was "more emotional than specific."

"Nobody has refuted our core premise that this would do a lot to stimulate the economy," he said. "The Palestinian people have been trapped in a situation for a long time and we wanted to show them, and their leadership, that there is a pathway forward that could be quite exciting."

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Jared Kushner, US president's adviser

Kushner said Trump decisions such as recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moving the US Embassy there from Tel Aviv were evidence that the president kept his promises.

"The Palestinians might not have liked his Jerusalem decision, but he made a promise and he did it," he said. What the president wanted now was "to give the Palestinian people a fair solution."

Kushner said the plan would double the GDP in 10 years, create over a million jobs, reduce poverty by 50 percent and bring unemployment to below 10 percent.

"We believe this doable," he said. "It's hard, but if there's a peace agreement and we set up the right structure, we think it could really lead to improving people's lives in a substantial way."

"I think there is a lot of enthusiasm in the West Bank and Gaza to see if we can find a political solution so that this can be implemented."

The political element of the White House plan has been delayed by uncertainty in Israel, where there will be elections this year after an earlier vote failed to produce a stable coalition, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may also face a criminal trial for corruption.



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Leaders gather in Bahrain for launch of \$50bn Palestinian economic plan
Egypt to go to Bahrain to 'evaluate' Kushner's Palestinian development plan:
minister

[Lebanese president insists on return of Syrian refugees](#)

Mon, 2019-06-24 23:56

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun has insisted on the return of Syrian refugees in Lebanon to their country, even if not to where they had been displaced.

He told a visiting US delegation on Monday that the return of refugees "can't wait for a political solution to the Syrian crisis, as it may take time due to international tensions over the Syrian situation."

Aoun said: "The wave of Syrian displacement has produced negative repercussions that has impacted all Lebanese sectors."

He added: “Lebanon, which has provided all the humanitarian and logistical facilities for refugees during the Syrian war, believes that Syrian territory, except for Idlib (province) and its surrounding area, is now stable, making it easier for refugees to return.”

Aoun called on the UN to provide assistance to internally displaced people (IDPs) inside Syria in order to encourage refugees to return and contribute to their country’s reconstruction.

The wave of Syrian displacement has produced negative repercussions that has impacted all Lebanese sectors.

Michel Aoun, Lebanese president

“Lebanon continues to organize return trips for refugees in coordination with the concerned Syrian authorities, who welcome their return,” he said, adding that his country “hasn’t been informed of any returnees getting harassed.”

The head of the delegation, Frederic Hof, said that after its meetings with Lebanese officials, it will submit a report on ideas, stances and proposals to resolve the Syrian crisis and its repercussions.

Some 1 million Syrians in Lebanon are registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The Lebanese General Security said it has facilitated the return of 172,046 refugees between December 2017 and March 19, 2019, through legal crossings.



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In Lebanon, Syrian refugees face new pressure to go homeLebanese move may render 35,000 Syrian refugees homeless

[Leaders gather in Bahrain for launch of \\$50bn Palestinian economic plan](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-06-24 23:43

CHICAGO: Although the fractious Palestinian leadership will not be present, President Donald Trump unveiled details of his “Peace to Prosperity” plan that will be the focus of workshops and meetings in Bahrain this week attended by representatives from the Arab world and America.

In a statement on Sunday, Trump announced: “Today, the United States Government announced ‘Peace to Prosperity,’ a new vision for the Palestinians and the broader Middle East region. Through its supporting programs and projects, ‘Peace to Prosperity’ aspires to empower the Palestinian people to build a prosperous and vibrant Palestinian society. The economic plan consists of three initiatives that will support distinct pillars of the Palestinian society: the economy, the people, and its governance.”

“With the potential to facilitate more than \$50 billion in new investment over 10 years, ‘Peace to Prosperity’ represents the most ambitious and comprehensive international effort for the Palestinians to date.”

Surprisingly, and despite criticism that the Bahrain conference is intended as a eulogy for Palestinian rights, the documents released by the Trump White House seem to emphasize at every turn the requirement to address the “needs” of the Palestinians.

“Generations of Palestinians have lived without knowing peace, and the West Bank and Gaza have fallen into a protracted crisis,” the introduction to the plan begins.

“Yet the Palestinian story will not end here. The Palestinian people continue their historic endeavor to realize their aspirations and build a better future for their children.”

The plan envisions a goal of providing up to \$50 billion in financial support to Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to build a prosperous

and vibrant Palestinian society upon three initiatives to support “the economy, the people, and the government.”

The \$50 billion will be divided among Palestinian needs but also support programs for Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon, according to the plan. Palestinians are to receive nearly \$28 billion while Jordan will get \$7 billion, Egypt \$9 billion and Lebanon \$6 billion.

The White House document, which will be delivered by Trump’s son-in-law and special Middle East representative, Jared Kushner, and special Middle East envoy, Jason Greenblatt, during meetings with representatives from countries including the UAE, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, predicts it will empower Palestinians “to build the society that they have aspired to establish for generations.”

Writing on Twitter, Greenblatt said: “The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia confirms that His Excellency Minister of Economy and Planning Mohammed Al-Tuwaijri will participate in the ‘Peace to Prosperity’ workshop organized by the Kingdom of Bahrain in partnership with the USA.”

FASTFACT

The plan envisions a goal of providing up to \$50 billion in financial support to Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to build a prosperous and vibrant Palestinian society upon three initiatives to support the economy, the people, and the government.

But the plan clearly carries a caveat: “Ultimately, however, the power to unlock it lies in the hands of the Palestinian people. Only through peace can the Palestinians achieve prosperity.”

Trump said that the Israeli government was not invited to the conference in Bahrain only because no officials from the Palestinian National Authority and government of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas would be attending.

Although the US has frozen most grant funds to the Palestinians during the past year, in response to the refusal of Palestinians to participate in peace talks with Israel, the plan appears to be a basis for the delivery of a new funding system for Palestinian needs.

The plan is outlined on a website launched by the White House at [www.whitehouse.gov/peacetoprosperty/.](http://www.whitehouse.gov/peacetoprosperty/)

Most of the funds will come from grants (\$13 billion), loans (\$26 billion) and private capital (\$12 billion).

A key focus of the plan is the expansion of transportation services to Palestinians in both the Israeli-occupied West Bank and the Israeli-controlled Gaza Strip. Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005 but has since established an oppressive embargo.

The 95-page document also details goals for business development, health care, building government civil service operations, a legal and tax system, defining property rights, “judicial independence,” creating international trade and foreign direct investment, and a system of accountability and government transparency.

In addition, it calls for supporting arts and culture, sports, education and training.

The goal, according to the plan, is to “empower the Palestinian people.”

Not discussed in the plan are the current Israeli military controls over Palestinians, the Israeli policy of confiscating Arab-owned land to build Jewish-only settlements, and Israel’s policies of extrajudicial killing and the targeting of individuals it asserts are engaged in violence.



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Egypt to go to Bahrain to ‘evaluate’ Kushner’s Palestinian development plan:
minister Jordanian experts divided over participation in Bahrain workshop