

# IMF team agrees on \$1.3bn, 4-year aid package for Jordan

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Thu, 2020-01-30 17:01

WASHINGTON: Jordanian officials reached an agreement with the International Monetary Fund on a \$1.3 billion, four-year aid program to help authorities stabilize the economy, the IMF announced Thursday.

The loan, which must be approved by the board of the Washington-based crisis lender, will help the government bring down public debt and spending gradually while supporting economic growth, as the country hosts an influx of Syrian refugees the IMF said in a statement.

The aid program "will reinforce the authorities' ambitious macroeconomic and structural reform agenda for the next four years," IMF mission chief Chris Jarvis said.

The government program is focused on "enhancing the conditions for more inclusive economic growth, particularly in light of the challenges posed by ongoing regional conflict and uncertainty," he said.

That includes steps to reduce tax evasion and improve the investment climate, while boosting growth. Among the key reforms the government will reduce electricity prices for businesses and shift household subsidies to benefit "only to those who need it," Jarvis said.

"In addition, the authorities will introduce measures to help young people and women enter the labor force."

GDP growth is projected to reach 2.1 percent in 2020 and increase gradually in the coming years to 3.3 percent. Inflation will remain subdued in 2020, at under 1 percent, but is expected to rise 2.5 percent over the next few years, he said.



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## [US sanctions Iran's nuclear organisation, to renew waivers on Iran nuclear work](#)

Thu, 2020-01-30 18:31

WASHINGTON: The US on Thursday imposed sanctions on Iran's nuclear entity and its top official, the Treasury Department said, but sources said it will allow Russian, Chinese and European firms to continue work at Iranian nuclear sites to make it harder for that country to develop a nuclear weapon.

The Trump administration, which in 2018 pulled out of the 2015 Iran nuclear

deal and reimposed sanctions on Iran, will let the work go forward by issuing waivers to sanctions that bar non-US firms from dealing with the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, the sources said on condition of anonymity.

The waivers' renewal for 60 days will allow nonproliferation work to continue at the Arak heavy-water research reactor, the Bushehr nuclear power plant, the Tehran Research Reactor and other nuclear cooperation initiatives.

"There was a difference of opinion between the US Treasury and State Department. The Treasury won," said a Western diplomat familiar with the issue. "There is an appetite for more sanctions, so this was a surprise; but others argue that these waivers are vital to ensure nonproliferation."

A US official confirmed the waivers.

Ali Akbar Salehi, head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, and the organization itself have been placed under US sanctions, according to the Treasury's website.

The US special representative for Iran, Brian Hook, is scheduled to hold a news briefing on Thursday afternoon, the State Department said. He is expected to talk about the waivers and fresh sanctions.

Washington in November terminated the sanctions waiver related to Iran's Fordow nuclear plant after Tehran resumed uranium enrichment at the underground site.

There had been a great deal of lobbying in Washington to stop the latest waivers as President Donald Trump seeks to exert more pressure on Iran. It was not immediately clear why Washington had decided to extend the waivers.

Under the 2015 deal between Iran and six world powers – Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States – Tehran agreed to limit its nuclear program in return for the lifting of economic sanctions that had crippled its economy.

Trump unilaterally abandoned the deal in May 2018, and reimposed U.S. sanctions in a "maximum pressure" campaign designed to force Iran to return to the negotiating table.

The decision to sanction Salehi and the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran would have an impact on Iran's nuclear civilian program because it has operational control over the program, including purchasing parts for nuclear facilities.

The diplomat said the US had likely opted to extend the Bushehr waiver because the Russian company targeted also provides nuclear fuel to US facilities, causing a potential sanctions headache for the administration.



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## [Iraq parties locked in talks over new PM as clock ticks to Feb. 1 deadline](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2020-01-30 14:55

BAGHDAD: Iraq's political factions were in high-stake talks Thursday to name

a new prime minister, after the president set a February 1 deadline to replace Adel Abdel Mahdi.

Months of mass anti-government protests led Abdel Mahdi to resign in December, but he has stayed on since in a caretaker role while political factions have struggled to find a successor.

Any contender would need the approval not only of the political class but also of Iraq's Shiite religious authority, neighboring Iran, its rival the United States and the protest movement.

Two days ahead of the Saturday deadline, "President Barham Saleh is hosting the various political blocs to try to find a consensus candidate," a source from his office told AFP.

Saleh had sent a letter to Iraq's deeply-divided parliament, giving it until Saturday to nominate a new premier after months of paralysis. Otherwise, he said, he would name someone unilaterally.

As the clock was ticking, the United Nations' top official in Iraq ramped up pressure, too.

"It is high time to restore confidence by setting aside partisanship, acting in the interest of the country and its people," said Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert in a statement.

"Iraq cannot afford the ongoing violent oppression nor the political and economic paralysis."

According to Iraq's constitution, parliament's largest bloc must nominate a prime minister within 15 days of legislative elections.

The candidate is then tasked by the president with forming a government within one month.

But Iraq is in uncharted waters, as the constitution makes no provisions for the PM's resignation and the 15-day period since Abdel Mahdi stepped down has long expired.

It is also unclear if the constitution allows the president to name his own candidate in this situation.

Saleh's letter sent factions into last-minute crisis talks, with one political figure saying they were "tense."

"They are divided over the old names that have been circulating in recent months and are even coming up with new names now," said the politician.

Possible successors that have been floated include an adviser to the president, an intelligence chief, political operatives and former top officials, among others.

One reason for the continued stalemate, a top government official told AFP, is the absence of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani and Iraqi commander Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, who were both killed in a US drone strike in Baghdad on January 3.

The two influential figures had often taken the lead in brokering political agreements among parties.



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## [Thousands join Gaza protests against peace plan](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-01-30 01:42

GAZA CITY: Thousands of Palestinians have taken to the streets of Gaza to protest against US President Donald Trump's newly unveiled peace plan for the Middle East.

Youths set fire to tires and burned pictures of Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during demonstrations on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Social media was also awash with angry backlashes to the deal which many posters claimed would only exert further pressure on the Palestinian people.

As part of the long-awaited plan, Trump has proposed a Palestinian state double the size of existing Palestinian territories, with East Jerusalem as its capital and a US Embassy there.

But Hamas official Raafat Morra said: "National unity and Palestinian popular steadfastness at home and abroad, adhering to the resistance project by all means, and cooperating with the living forces in the nation, are the best ways to confront the new American-Israeli plan."

Reiterating Hamas' comprehensive rejection of the plan, he added that it would lead to the "liquidation of the Palestinian cause, the confirmation of the Israeli occupation, and the cancelation of all Palestinian rights."

Secretary-general of the Islamic Jihad, Ziyad Al-Nakhalah, said on Wednesday that the US president's "deal of the century" threw up great challenges.

"This plan poses a major challenge that requires us to change our approach to dealing with everything. This challenge must make us leave the norm and push us to create new facts with our sacrifices and to have the willingness and motivation to confront and address this bullying without hesitation," he added.

Shops closed and students stayed away from schools on Wednesday in Gaza after Palestinian factions called for a general strike.

Sama Ayoub, 45, said: "My children did not go to school today. We reject the deal of the century, which I believe to be the slap of the century. As (Palestinian) President Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) said, there will be no peace without obtaining the minimum of our rights.

"What do they want us to accept – that we give up Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa and all our rights, that our lands be confiscated without being refused, that we accept it for money?" she added.

But Raed Dabban, 35, said: "There are exciting aspects of the deal. Our current situation in Palestine is bad, especially in the Gaza Strip.

"Palestinian leaders must search for solutions to reality in the Gaza Strip in particular and strengthen the resilience of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Jerusalem, so that everyone can reject with all power the concessions that compromise our rights.

"We are on the threshold of a critical stage in our political life and our future, and our living conditions are bad. People cannot stand up without the ingredients for resilience. This is the role of leaders," he added.

Following a phone conversation with Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas' political bureau chief, Abbas announced on Tuesday that a delegation from Ramallah would be sent to Gaza for reconciliation talks. Palestinian diplomat Saeb Erekat also said that a delegation from the Fatah party would go to Gaza next week to

meet with Hamas.



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Palestinians consider next step in opposition to US plan 'Palestinians have to work and fight together,' Middle East's elder statesman Lakhdar Brahimi tells Arab News

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## [Palestinians consider next step in opposition to US plan](#)

Thu, 2020-01-30 01:39

AMMAN: As the details of Washington's peace plan becomes clear, Palestinian leaders are searching for a way forward that avoids acquiescing to US and Israeli demands.

Veteran Jordanian-Palestinian writer Lamas Andon told Arab News that while



Palestinian leaders have a right to reject the plan, they must look inward to find a way forward.

“Palestinians have an opportunity to lead and set the tone of their own future because they are in charge now and can’t wait on anyone else to help.”

Palestinians believe that the huge US document demonstrates America’s bias. The terms “Jews” and “Jewish” are mentioned 1,806 times, compared to just 303 and 473 for “Muslim” and “Christian” respectively.

Israel is mentioned nearly five times more than Palestine. Palestine will have its borders, its airspace and its international waters controlled by Israel, which will, at certain times, “have the right to enter the areas earmarked for the state of Palestine.”

Andoni told Arab News that the other option available to Palestinians is international law: “The International criminal court and the court of criminal justice have shown interest in supporting Palestinian rights. Therefore, all legal battles must be waged against Israel.”

Nabil Shaath, an adviser to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, told the US-based Al-Monitor news site that Abbas has approved a possible major confrontation with Israel.

“The president has re-emphasized the need for national unity, and has agreed to a request to go to Gaza to attend a unity meeting, he has supported the need for popular struggle and has called for the revisit of the functions of the Palestinian Authority.

“The move to implement the decisions of the Palestine National and Central Councils will obviously include the decision to suspend security coordination.”

But Israeli media reported that the security coordination has not been suspended, despite suggestions from Abbas’s office.

In addition to the legal front, Andoni believes that supporters of Palestinians must step up their efforts with the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

He added that he hoped that an intifada would erupt.

Andoni’s call was also echoed by Abbas, who has agreed to a call for a national unity conference in Gaza with the participation of all factions including Hamas, Fatah and Islamic Jihad as well as independents.

Mufid Abed Rabo, a Fatah activist and one of the leaders of the first intifada, told Arab News that the unity efforts that were seen in the Tuesday night meeting in Ramallah must be followed up with serious and strategic steps.

Palestinian supporters have responded angrily to the US plans with demonstrations and public strikes throughout the occupied Palestinian

territories.

In his speech carried live on Palestine TV, Abbas also spoke about the popular struggle, but it was not clear how serious the Palestinian leadership is willing to commit to an escalation of unarmed attacks against Israel.

The nonviolent struggle has long been discussed and debated among Palestinians without a clear guideline. In Gaza, unarmed attacks in the form of the Great March of Return were often politically manipulated and failed to stay totally nonviolent.

The new frontier for the coming months will be the Jordan Valley, where about 50,000 Palestinians live, as opposition grows to the possibility of an Israeli annexation of these lands.



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