



# The Problem Confronting Trump's Peace Plan

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Later this month, unless it is delayed by Israel's current political turmoil, the Trump administration will start rolling out its long awaited, much-debated plan for Mideast peace. But whenever Washington renews its pressure on Jerusalem and Ramallah to return to meaningful talks, it will face a daunting hurdle. After years of political stagnation, the government of Palestinian Authority (PA) Chairman Mahmoud Abbas is increasingly seen by its constituents as part of the problem, rather than part of the solution, to their ills.

The depths of this disaffection are eloquently captured in a new poll of more than 1,000 respondents in the West Bank and Gaza Strip carried out this spring by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR), the preeminent polling institute in the Palestinian Territories.

At present, the PSR survey found, more than 80 percent of Palestinians believe that the Palestinian Authority is profoundly corrupt. Nearly 70 percent are dissatisfied with the performance of Abbas' government, and a majority (60 percent) want him to resign. It's not surprising, then, that nearly half of all Palestinians (47 percent) now see Abbas' government as a "burden" on the Palestinian people, rather than an "asset" to their cause.

But a substitute isn't readily available. Over the past decade-and-a-half, Chairman Abbas has worked diligently to avoid establishing a clear line of political succession, and deftly maneuvered to sideline more moderate, bureaucratically-minded rivals. This state of affairs, coupled with Abbas' advanced age and ill health, virtually guarantees that the Territories will descend into significant – and perhaps both protracted and bloody – infighting once he departs the political scene.

Rather, the only real alternative to Abbas and his government remains Hamas, the radical Islamist movement that governs the Gaza Strip. A dozen years after its hostile takeover there, Hamas still commands the support of a third of all Gazans, despite years of misrule that have expanded poverty and misery among the local population. In a sign of popular discontent with Abbas' government, Hamas is also viewed positively by one-quarter of West Bank residents – suggesting that the Islamist movement's appeal extends far beyond its current fiefdom.

The group's credibility is further bolstered by souring Palestinian attitudes toward the possibility of reconciliation with Israel. In the PSR survey, 47 percent of those polled said they "support a returned to an armed intifada" against the Jewish state. Hamas is clearly best positioned to capitalize on that sentiment, should the Palestinians decide to truly back such a sustained offensive.

In fact, the only thing that Palestinians across the Territories seems to agree upon is that Trump's "deal of the century" is a non-starter. In the PSR poll, respondents expressed uniformly negative views of the new U.S. initiative, with overwhelming majorities believing that the plan won't call for the creation of a Palestinian state or provide what they would consider a "just solution" to their situation. That's why more than three-quarters (79%) of those polled "believe that the PA leadership should reject the Trump plan." Hamas and the PA, meanwhile, are savvy enough to seize upon this sentiment, which is why both parties have preemptively ruled out participating in new negotiations with Israel under the auspices of the Trump administration.

All of which makes it exceedingly difficult to envision that the White House's new peace push turns out to be the success that Administration officials hope it could be. Indeed, the President's son-in-law and senior advisor, Jared Kushner, admitted as much in a recent televised interview, in which he noted that the Palestinian government currently isn't fully functional, let alone prepared for real peace-making.

Kushner's comments reflect a harsh reality. In diplomacy, it takes two to tango. And, at least for now, it's abundantly clear that Israel lacks a meaningful dance partner on the Palestinian side.