

# US economic plan for Middle East peace gets chilly reaction

Sun, 2019-06-23 18:59

JERUSALEM: The economic component of the Trump administration's long-awaited Middle East peace plan drew chilly responses from regional allies Sunday, two days before it was to be discussed at a conference in the Gulf.

An Israeli minister called a major piece of the White House's "peace to prosperity" plan "irrelevant," while Jordan and Egypt restated their support for a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, pouring cold water on Washington's focus on economic issues.

The \$50 billion economic plan, published on Saturday, calls for massive infrastructure projects and job creation for Palestinians. It makes no mention of Palestinian political aspirations – a state in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem, lands Israel captured in 1967.

The plan does not address the core issues of the conflict: the contested holy city of Jerusalem, sought by both peoples as a capital; the fate of more than 5 million Palestinian refugees and their descendants; and the borders of a future Palestinian state.

American officials say these issues will not be raised at this week's conference in Bahrain. Neither Israel nor the Palestinians will have official representation at the two-day summit. The US delegation is to be led by Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin.

Palestinian Finance Minister Shukri Bishara said on Sunday that Palestinians do not need this week's US-led Bahrain meeting to develop their country, they need peace.

The June 25-26 conference in the Bahraini capital Manama, which the Palestinian Authority is boycotting, will discuss US-led proposals for an economic vision to be presented by US President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, part of a wider plan to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

While many Arab states are attending the meeting, the plan has drawn rebuke as an attempt to circumvent Palestinian demands for an independent state on lands captured in the 1967 war.

"We don't need the Bahrain meeting to build our country, we need peace, and the sequence of (the plan) – economic revival followed by peace – is unrealistic and an illusion," Bishara said on the sidelines of a meeting of Arab finance ministers in Cairo.

"First of all, give us our land and our freedom."

While the precise outline of the political part of Kushner's plan has been shrouded in secrecy, officials briefed on it say he has jettisoned the two-state solution that envisages an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.

Kushner told Reuters that the plan, previously dubbed the "deal of the century," could be the "opportunity of the century" for the Palestinians. In an address to Sunday's meeting at the Arab League headquarters, Bishara cited the "bitter experience" of the Palestinians since the 1993 Oslo Accords, including the US decision to cut aid to the UN Relief and Works

Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinian refugees.

"We are careful and skeptical of what is called the deal of the century – or what was called a couple of days ago, the opportunity of the century," Bishara said.

Sunday's Arab finance ministers' meeting was called to discuss the Palestinian budget deficit, which Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit put at \$700 million for the current year.

The finance ministers said they were committed to activating a financial safety net for the Palestinians of \$100 million a month, agreed upon at previous Arab meetings.

The Trump administration said it did not invite Israeli officials in order to keep the conference apolitical. The Palestinians have refused to attend, saying the US plan adopts hard line Israeli positions and neglects the internationally backed two-state solution.

Speaking Sunday in an interview with Israeli public radio, Cabinet minister Tzachi Hanegbi said one of the proposals in the Trump plan– a land link connecting the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip – was "irrelevant" so long as Hamas controls the latter.

The Trump administration's outline calls for "a major road and, potentially, a modern rail line" between the West Bank and Gaza, saying this would "reduce the complications of travel for Palestinians" and stimulate commerce.

"It will be relevant when Gaza will stop being a pro-Iranian terror kingdom, meaning it's irrelevant today and in the foreseeable future," said Hanegbi, Israel's minister for regional cooperation and an ally of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The 10-year plan calls for projects worth \$6.3 billion for Palestinians in Lebanon, as well as \$27.5 billion in the West Bank and Gaza, \$9.1 billion in Egypt and \$7.4 billion in Jordan.

Lebanon's Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri said Sunday that the country will not be "tempted" by money into what he said amounts to giving up Palestinian rights.

Berri said in a statement carried by the state-run National News Agency that although Lebanon is currently dealing with an economic crisis, it would be a mistake to think that billions of dollars could convince the government to abandon Palestinians' rights as refugees.

Sufian Qudah, a spokesman for Jordan's Foreign Ministry, said that while Jordan would attend the conference, "no economic proposal can replace a political settlement to the conflict which must be resolved according to the two-state solution."

\*Reuters and AP



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Arab League renews pledge to give Palestinians \$100m in aid monthly  
Lebanon refuses investment at expense of Palestinian cause: Berri

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## [Some 6,700 Syrian students enrolled in Jordanian universities](#)

Sun, 2019-06-23 20:28

AMMAN: The Secretary General of the Amman based Association of the Arab Universities (AARU) Omar Salamah estimated the number of Syrian refugee students enrolled in the Jordanian universities in the 2018-2019 academic year at around 6,700, majoring in different scientific fields.

Salamah said in a statement issued recently that the AARU has carried out a special project to support Syrian students taking refuge in Lebanon, Iraq's Kurdistan and Jordan.

The project, which is funded by the United Nations along with Turkey, Germany and the Mediterranean Universities Union (UNIMED), is carried out in cooperation with the National Erasmus. It seeks to help partner countries' universities enroll Syrian students in different academic majors through setting specialized units to help and employ them.

He said that the mission of these units is to support Syrian refugee students in resuming their academic and professional lives.

Salamah said that in addition to scholarships, the project offers training courses for Syrian students in various professional and technical spheres, teaches languages and organizes field science trips

and activities to heritage sites in countries that are included in the project.

He highlighted that the AARU keeps in touch with the universities that enroll Syrian refugees to follow up on their academic progress.

Syrian students in Jordan are concentrated in the Yarmouk University, Zarqa University and Al-Zaytoonah University, he added.

The AARU will keep supporting the Syrian students and, in cooperation with Jordanian and Arab universities, will work on offering them with what they need to continue their higher education in an environment that stimulates creativity, he explained.

He stressed the need to provide a suitable environment for teaching and scientific research for Syrian students to harness necessary skills required to get a future job in the host countries or in their own in case they return after the end of the crisis.

Salamah emphasized that the AARU has been contacting international organizations to offer scholarships for Syrian refugees in universities all over the world.



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Syrian students face hurdles in entering Saudi universities

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## [UAE calls for talks to defuse US-Iran tensions](#)

Sun, 2019-06-23 16:40

ABU DHABI: The United Arab Emirates on Sunday called for negotiations to defuse tensions between the United States and Iran after Tehran shot down a US drone.

“Tensions in the Gulf can only be addressed politically,” Anwar Gargash, UAE minister of state for foreign affairs, wrote on Twitter.

He said the crisis in the Gulf region “requires collective attention, primarily to de-escalate and to find political solutions through dialogue and negotiations.”

“Regional voices (are) important to achieve sustainable solutions,” said Gargash.

Tehran on Thursday shot down a US surveillance drone which it said entered Iranian airspace, a claim denied by Washington which said the aircraft was above international waters.

The United States launched cyberattacks against Iranian missile control systems and a spy network in retaliation for the drone incident, according to US media reports Saturday.

Tehran is yet to react to the reports published by The Washington Post and Yahoo News.

US President Donald Trump said Friday he had called off strikes against Iran at the last minute, as such an attack would not have been a “proportionate” response.



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Trump says US 'moving forward' with additional sanctions on IranBritish

minister to visit Iran on Sunday for talks on tensions

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## [Saudi Arabia, UAE, UK, US condemn Abha Airport attack, 'dangerous' Iranian influence](#)

Sun, 2019-06-23 17:54

LONDON: Saudi Arabia, the UAE, US and the UK have condemned the Houthi attack on Abha Airport in the south of the Kingdom earlier this month which injured 26 people, while calling for Iran to stop actions that destabilize the region.

During a meeting held in London, the quartet of countries expressed their concern over escalating tensions in the Middle East and the danger the Iranian regime poses in Yemen and across the Gulf, including attacks on oil tankers off the coast Fujairah on 12 May and in the Gulf of Oman on 13 June.

The quartet said in a statement the Houthis had to end all restrictions on food aid deliveries to Sanaa from the World Food Programme to ensure the delivery of life-saving assistance to people in need.

The four nations added that they were committed to the Yemeni peace process and fully support the UN Yemen envoy Martin Griffiths, saying: "We call on the Yemeni parties to engage constructively with the special envoy to accelerate implementation of the agreements reached in Stockholm. We call on the Houthis to facilitate full and unhindered access for UNMHA, UNDP and UNVIM.

"We call on the Houthis to withdraw fully from the ports of Hodeidah, Ras Issa and Saleef and we look to the Security Council to review progress when they meet on 17 July," they said.



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Human Rights Watch declares Houthi Abha airport attack a 'war crime' as another missile targets city  
US working with Arab Coalition to prevent Iran from arming Houthis: envoy

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## [Iraq boosts security measures at base where US trainers stay](#)

Author:

AP

ID:

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Sun, 2019-06-23 01:49

BAGHDAD: Security measures were increased at one of Iraq's largest air bases that houses American trainers following an attack last week, a top Iraqi air force commander said on Saturday. The US military said operations at the base

were going on as usual and there were currently no plans to evacuate personnel.

The stepped-up Iraqi security measures at Balad Air Base, just north of the capital, Baghdad, come amid sharply rising tensions in the Middle East between the US and Iran.

The current regional crisis is rooted in the US withdrawal last year from the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers. Washington subsequently reimposed sanctions on Iran, sending its economy into freefall and cutting deeply into its oil exports.

Gen. Falah Fares told The Associated Press by telephone that the measures include a nighttime curfew, boosting security inside and near the base as well as surveillance of nearby areas. He said these measures are being carried out in coordination with the US

“All unnecessary movements have been reduced,” Fares said, adding that the curfew now lasts from sunset until sunrise. He said the change was made after Balad Air Base, home to a squadron of Iraqi F-16 fighter jets, was hit with three mortar shells last week without inflicting casualties. The curfew had previously been from midnight to sunrise, he said.

Col. Kevin Walker, US Air Forces Central Command Director of Force Protection, denied in a statement later on Saturday reports that US forces are evacuating contractors or any other personnel from Balad Air Base.

## **FASTFACT**

Iraq hosts more than 5,000 US troops, and is home to powerful Iranian-backed militias, some of whom want those US forces to leave.

“Operations at Balad Air Base are continuing as normal. Claims that personnel are being evacuated are categorically false,” Walker said. “There are no plans at this time to evacuate any personnel from Balad.”

“The safety and security of all air force personnel and those that provide services to the US Air Force are constantly evaluated, and should there be increased threats to our people, the US Air Force will put measures in place to provide the protections required,” he said.

Like neighboring Iran, Iraq has been trying to maintain a fine line between allies Tehran and Washington. There have been concerns that Baghdad could once again get caught in the middle, just as it is on the path to recovery. Iraq hosts more than 5,000 US troops, and is home to powerful Iranian-backed militias, some of whom want those US forces to leave.



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