

International

# Nine in ten Palestinians distrust US economic plan: Opinion poll

## Trump 'very fond' of Abbas, willing to engage on peace plan

**RAMALLAH:** Nine in ten Palestinians do not believe or trust the US government's claim that its recently unveiled economic plan aims to improve their economic wellbeing, a poll published yesterday found. President Donald Trump's administration presented the economic part of its Israeli-Palestinian peace proposals, dubbed 'Peace to Prosperity', in the Bahraini capital Manama on June 25-6. But the poll, carried out by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research and the first since the Manama conference, found overwhelming distrust of Washington.

The Palestinians refused to attend the conference, accusing the US of systematic pro-Israel bias. Ninety percent of the 1,200 people polled said they did not believe or trust Washington's claim that the Bahrain meetings aimed to improve Palestinians' economic conditions. Trump's son-in-law and senior advisor Jared Kushner, who is leading the peace plan, has said he is seeking to reach out to ordinary Palestinians, bypassing their leaders.

But the survey also found 79 percent of the Palestinian population supported their leaders' boycott of the conference, while just 15 percent were opposed to that position. More than three quarters believed the US plan would not bring prosperity to the Palestinian economy. The poll also found three quarters of Palestinians wanted their leaders to outright reject the US plan. Fifteen percent said the plan should be accepted with reservations and just four percent wanted to accept it without reservations.

The Trump administration has taken a series of steps that have stoked Palestinian anger, including recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital in December 2017. Palestinians consider the eastern part of the city the capital of their own future state and Trump's move broke with decades of consensus. Both the Palestinian Authority and its rival Hamas—the Islamist group that runs the Gaza Strip—have lambasted the US economic plan as an attempt to buy them off, in return for foregoing any claim to their own state.

## Despite Turkey's assurances, US still targets sanctions

**WASHINGTON:** The Trump administration still plans to impose sanctions on Turkey and remove it from a critical fighter jet program if the NATO ally acquires Russian air defenses, US officials told Reuters, despite

## Sudan revolt: Deja-vu for Egyptians driven out by repression

**KHARTOUM:** Egyptians exiled in Sudan, who fled after their elected Islamist president was deposed by the military, say the current standoff in Khartoum reminds them of their own broken dreams. "It's the same young people that are trying to carry out the same revolutionary action," said Abdelaziz, an Egyptian student who has been in Sudan since 2016. "They have read the same books, lived the same experiences", he added.

For him and other Egyptians once close to the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood movement, the popular uprising in Sudan reminds them of events in their own country, even if there are some clear differences. Sudan's uprising has been led by liberal movements and unions of professionals, which spurred the military to overthrow Omar-al Bashir's Islamist regime. In Egypt itself, the Brotherhood polarised the youth movements that spearheaded the 2011 revolt. But Mohamed Morsi, Egypt's first democratically elected president, was likewise ousted by the army after mass protests against the Islamist's divisive year in power. Like Abdelaziz, many supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood ended up in Sudan after fleeing a deadly crackdown launched in 2013 in Egypt.

He fled to escape a 15-year prison sentence for "protesting" and "acts of vandalism". In Khartoum, sitting in the courtyard of his house and dressed in a traditional white Sudanese robe, he spoke to AFP using a pseudonym to protect the fragile stability of his new life. His host country has been swept up by the same revolutionary fervour that Egypt once experienced. Post-Bashir Khartoum in 2019 has much in common with Cairo after January 2011, when president Hosni Mubarak was toppled by a popular uprising.

On the walls of the city, the slogans are the same: "Down with the military government". The graffiti depicting Bashir is accompanied by the clarion call of the Arab Spring that once reverberated across Egypt, Tunisia and

## Over 100 civilians killed in fresh South Sudan violence: UN

**NAIROBI:** The UN said yesterday that conflict had intensified in a region of South Sudan since a peace deal was signed, with hundreds of civilians raped or murdered by warring factions. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) said civilians had been "deliberately and brutally targeted" in Central Equatoria since the agreement was inked in September. At least 104 people had been killed in attacks on villages in the southern region, it said. A roughly similar number of women and girls were raped or suffered other sexual violence between September and April, it said in its latest human rights report.

Many were taken captive by armed groups to serve as "wives," it said. The surge in violence has forced more than 56,000 civilians to flee their homes, becoming displaced in South Sudan itself, while another 20,000 have crossed the border into Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. South Sudan descended into war in 2013 when President Salva Kiir accused his former deputy and fellow

### 'Very fond' of Abbas

Meanwhile, White House adviser Jared Kushner said yesterday the United States is willing to engage with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas but hinted a new peace plan might call on Palestinian refugees to settle where they are and not return to lands now in Israel. At a workshop in Bahrain last week, Kushner unveiled a \$50 billion economic plan for the Palestinian territories, Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon.

Sometime later this year, he is to outline a 50- to 60-page plan that will offer proposals on resolving the thorny political issues between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Palestinians have harshly criticized the economic plan. In a conference call with reporters, Kushner said US President Donald Trump is "very fond" of Abbas and willing to engage with him at the right time. "Our door is always open to the Palestinian leadership," Kushner said.

He said he believes Abbas wants peace but "certain people around him are very uncomfortable with the way we've approached this, and their natural reaction is to attack and say crazy things" that are not constructive. But Kushner's comments on Palestinian refugees are likely to raise concerns among Palestinians. Whether the hundreds of thousands of refugees from the 1948 war of Israel's founding, which with their descendants now number around 5 million, will exercise a right of return has been among the thorniest issues in decades of difficult diplomacy.

Israel has long ruled out any such influx as destabilizing, arguing that refugees should stay where they are or in a future Palestinian state. But prospects of such a state arising in the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip are themselves in doubt. Asked by a Lebanese reporter whether the United States hoped Arab countries hosting Palestinian refugees would accept them permanently in exchange for funding, Kushner declined to answer directly, saying the matter would be addressed later. But he suggested a comparison between Jews dis-

placed from Middle Eastern countries in 1948, many of whom Israel took in.

"Look, you have a situation when this whole thing started where you had 800,000 Jewish refugees that came out of all the different Middle Eastern countries and you had 800,000, roughly, Palestinian refugees," he said.



**KHARTOUM:** An Egyptian student who fled political repression in Egypt and moved to Sudan is pictured in Khartoum. —AFP

Syria: "get out". "A very enthusiastic person asked my opinion of the situation in Sudan... I laughed and said 'we did the same thing as you and here we are sitting by your side'", said Abdelaziz, who is in his twenties. "Let's not be too optimistic, let's stay realistic", he added.

If he is cautious, it is because in his country, the democratic moment ended with the removal of Morsi, and paved the way for the repression of not only Islamists but also secularists. Detained for almost six years and kept in isolation, the ex-president died after collapsing during a court appearance on June 17. His Muslim Brotherhood was branded a "terrorist organisation", and thousands of his supporters were sentenced to years in prison or handed down the death penalty.

In August 2013, security forces dispersed a pro-Morsi sit-in at Cairo's Rabaa al-Adawiya square, killing more than 700 people in one day. "Sudan appeared to be something of a safe haven at a particular time for Islamist opponents of the Egyptian regime", said H.A. Hellyer, senior associate fellow at the Royal United Services Institute in London. Bashir consistently denied that his country granted asylum to members of the Brotherhood. In 2017, Sudan and Egypt signed an agreement not to host any opposition groups hostile to their respective governments. —AFP

former rebel leader Riek Machar of plotting a coup. The conflict has been marked by ethnic violence and brutal atrocities, and left about 380,000 dead while some four million have fled their homes. UNMISS said overall there had been a "significant decrease" in violence across the country since Kiir and Machar signed the deal. "However, Central Equatoria has been an exception to this trend, particularly in areas surrounding Yei, where attacks against civilians have continued," the report said.

The report identified government forces, fighters allied to Machar and rebel groups who did not sign the peace agreement, as responsible for atrocities in their quest to take territory in Central Equatoria. In the first phase of fighting, that coincided with the signing of the peace agreement, at least 61 civilians were killed in deliberate attacks or caught in indiscriminate crossfire. "At least 150 civilians were also held in captivity by these groups, including women and girls taken as 'wives' by commanders or raped and beaten by multiple fighters," the report said.

The second outbreak of violence began in January, when government forces punished those believed to be rebel collaborators with "sexual violence as well as looting and destroying homes, churches, schools and health centres". Under the peace deal, Kiir agreed to set up a unity government with longtime rival Machar, who is to return from exile. But this new government, initially scheduled to take office on May 12, was postponed for six months. —AFP



**BUREIJ:** A Palestinian protester wearing a Guy Fawkes' mask on the back of his head watches as another flees from tear gas fired by Israeli forces across the fence during clashes along the border in the central Gaza Strip. —AFP

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it takes delivery of the Russian S-400 system, as expected.

"The United States has consistently and clearly stated that Turkey will face very real and negative consequences if it proceeds with its S-400 acquisition, including suspension of procurement and industrial participation in the F-35 program and exposure to sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)," a State Department spokeswoman said. At the Pentagon, spokesman Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Mike Andrews said: "Nothing has changed."

"And what's happened to the Israeli - to the Jewish - refugees, is they have been absorbed by different places whereas the Arab world has not absorbed a lot of these refugees over time," he said. "I think that the people of Lebanon would love to see a resolution to this issue, one that is fair," he said.—Agencies

"Turkey's purchase of the Russian S-400 air and missile defense system is incompatible with the F-35 program. Turkey will not be permitted to have both systems," Andrews said. If the United States removes Turkey from the F-35 program, and imposes sanctions on the NATO ally, it would be one of the most significant ruptures in recent history in the relationship between the two nations. Trump, who has shown a rapport with Erdogan, could still try to change course by seeking to issue a waiver and postpone sanctions. Such a move would please Ankara but upset some of Trump's allies in Congress. —Reuters

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