

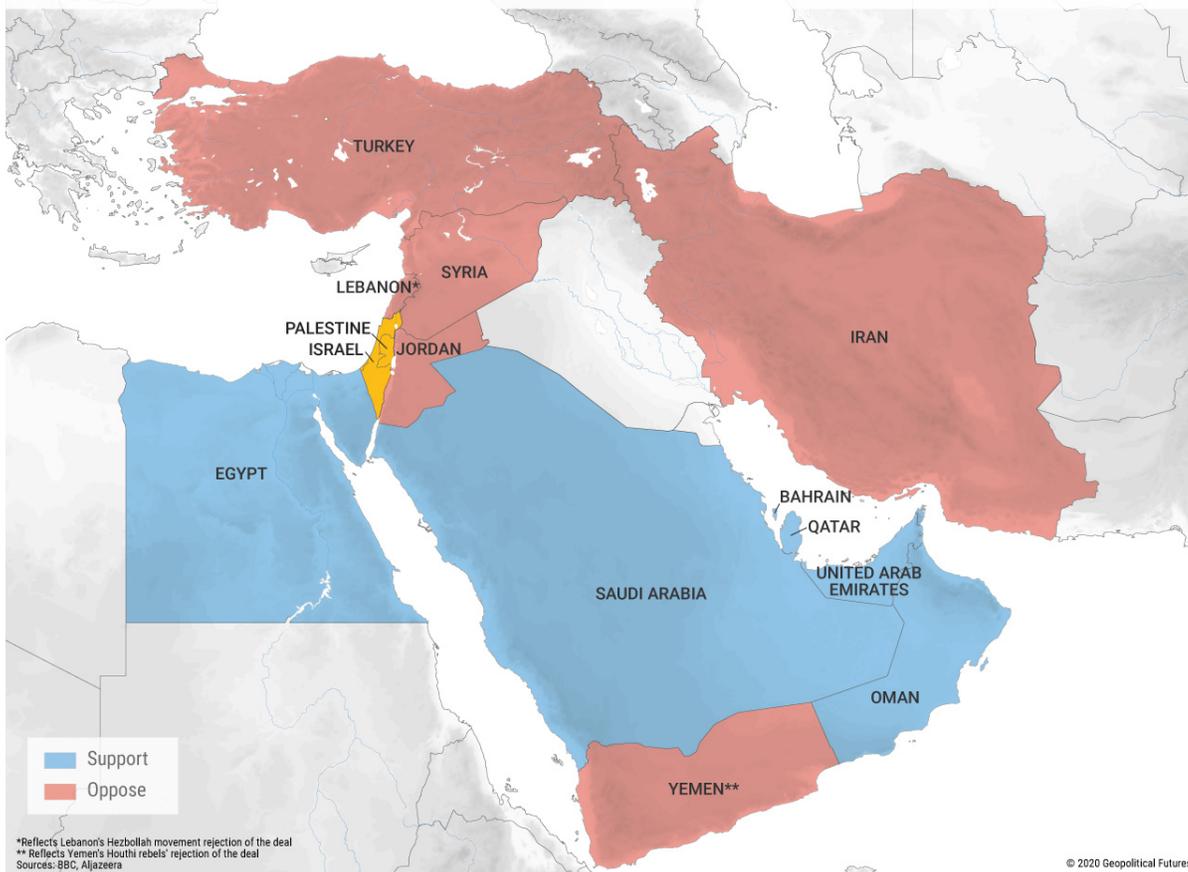
# What the Middle East Peace Plan Really Means

by **Caroline Rose** - January 29, 2020

The “Deal of the Century,” the name the Trump administration has given the Middle East peace plan released yesterday, is historically significant – just not for the reasons you’d think. Territorially, it wouldn’t change much for Israel and the Palestinian Territories; it lets Israel retain most of the land it currently controls, keeping a third of the West Bank for itself, while conceding very little to the Palestinians, who have already enthusiastically rejected the proposal.

No, the Deal of the Century is remarkable for the overwhelming support it has among Gulf Arab states. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Bahrain, Qatar and Morocco have all endorsed the proposal, though they have offered nothing specific about what they would do to see it through. Still, their collective rush to champion the deal is notable for what the breach between Arab Gulf states and the Palestinian Authority signifies: the new geopolitical reality emerging in the Middle East, one arrayed against the actions of Turkey and Iran.

## Support and Opposition for the Middle East Peace Plan



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The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has defined the battle lines and the foreign policies of Sunni Arab states for more than half a century. Siding with the Palestinian cause and opposing Israeli aggression was a policy fixture of Arab countries, particularly of Egypt, which led the pan-Arab movement in the mid-20th century. Arab support in this regard was formalized in the Arab League, the Palestinian National Council and, later, the Palestine Liberation Organization. The Palestinians relied on Arab funds and weaponry in their intifadas and, in some cases, multilateral intervention in the face of Israeli military action. Even after Arab states began to engage in limited cooperation with Israel, they still rhetorically advocated for Palestine. But over the past few years, Israel and Arab Gulf countries have found more common ground on matters of mutual interest, which means the unconditional backing of Palestine is coming to an end.

The alliance between Gulf states and Israel had been developing over the past 20 or so years, as evidenced by informal intelligence-sharing and limited security cooperation over terrorist threats and Iranian proxies, but the new sense of urgency reflects the Arab Gulf's growing fears over the rise of Turkey and Iran and the need to confront both with a united front. Put simply, the expansion of Iranian influence has become the security priority to which all other foreign policy issues take a back seat. The same could be said in response to Turkey, which has been aggressively advancing its interests in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean. Unsurprisingly, Iran and Turkey, neither of which are Arab, have been the loudest voices outside the Palestinian Territories that oppose the Trump administration's peace deal.

In that sense, the "Deal of the Century" is not about an Israel-Palestine peace; it's about reconfiguring the alliance structure of the Middle East. Sunni Arab countries are beginning to pivot from foreign policies grounded in post-WWI realities and nationalisms stemming from 20th-century colonial mandates that defined the regional balance of power. Now they are becoming more visible in redefining regional geopolitics and aligning with former adversaries, grounded in new, emerging security threats.

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