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Trump's Israel-Palestine 'Deal of the Century'

With the stated intention of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Trump administration has unveiled a new peace plan called "Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People". Boosted by its proponents as the "Deal of the Century", the plan was drafted by Jared Kushner and other presidential aides. Announcing the plan, Trump claimed that it offers a "realistic two-state solution" and "could be the last opportunity" for Palestinians". According to the plan, Jerusalem would become Israel's undivided capital and Israel would gain sovereignty over its West Bank settlements, while Palestinians would gain an independent state in the remainder of the West Bank and Gaza.



Source: www.newyorker.com

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stood alongside when Trump unveiled the plan. Netanyahu then declared that his government would immediately annex the Jordan Valley and West Bank settlements, but also committed himself to cease for at least four years the creation of new settlements in areas left to the Palestinians.

Palestine President Mahmoud Abbas rejected the plan saying that Palestinian rights and hopes were not for sale. Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, has also expressed its opposition to the Trump plan, and called upon the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority to derecognise Israel and resume the armed struggle.

Although diplomatic representatives of the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman were present at the plan's unveiling in the White House, and Saudi Arabia and Egypt expressed appreciation for Trump's effort, the Arab League and Organization of Islamic Cooperation have unanimously rejected it as "unfair", "biased" and lacking "the minimum requirements of justice".

The European Union has termed the plan as a departure from international agreements on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Nor did the plan win the approval of leading Democratic presidential candidates. The plan, as the *Los Angeles Times* noted in an editorial, appears to have arrived 'dead in the water'.

Israel Develops Laser Shield

Israel's Ministry of Defence has announced a breakthrough in the development of laser systems for frontline lower-tier defence against short-range threats including missiles,

rockets and mortar shells. Currently, Israeli security forces use the Iron Dome mobile system for point-defence by intercepting rockets and short-range missiles launched by militia groups into Israeli territory. The new laser-based system, Iron Beam, will be the first system to use directed energy weapons for lower-tier and point-defence applications.



Source: www.jerusalempost.com

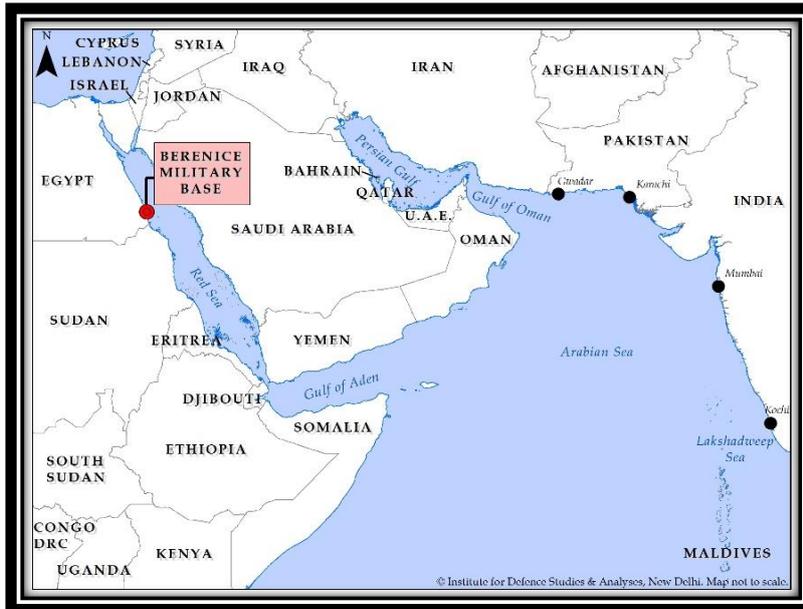
The solid-state laser system will undergo extensive tests before operational deployment through three programmes. The first two will be ground-based laser systems, including one with a manoeuvrable mobile capability, and the third an airborne version probably mounted on a C-UAV for protecting larger areas. Upon deployment, the Iron Beam is expected to complement, rather than supplant, the Iron Dome in providing a comprehensive, fool-proof and cost-effective interception capability for the

lower-tier. While the use of directed energy weapons involves many challenges, as evident from previous attempts like the US Airborne Laser (ABL), the Israeli breakthrough has been on creating a stable laser beam that has the power and coherence to provide accurate kill. The Iron Beam will literally be an 'inexhaustible' system solely dependent on electric power. It would have a range starting from 4.5 miles (for land systems) and beyond (for drones). It is likely to be more effective against smaller threats like artillery and mortar shells, which the Iron Dome cannot tackle.

While the potential success of Iron Beam will mark the advent of directed energy systems in multi-layer interception platforms, the fact that the US directed energy programmes covering a wide spectrum of platforms are also making significant progress is an indication of things to come for laser systems.

Egypt Begins Construction of Largest Military Base on Red Sea

On 15 January 2020, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi inaugurated the Bernice military base, the largest in the Red Sea region. The 150,000-acre facility would include a naval base, an airbase, an army hospital, combat and administrative units including firing ranges for shooting and training of all weapons.



The base is reported to be aimed at ‘protecting and securing the Southern Egyptian coasts, protecting economic investments and natural resources in the area, confronting security challenges within the Red Sea, and securing global navigation traffic through the Red Sea to the country’s Suez Canal and related economic areas.’

The base would provide Egypt with strategic visibility in the Red Sea which has been witnessing increasing multi-national military presence due to rising tensions in the Middle East. The European Union is set to open its Maritime Security Mission Headquarters for the Gulf in Abu Dhabi to ensure the safety of maritime navigation in the wake of attacks on oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz last year. These attacks have also led to Japan initiating the operation of an intelligence gathering mission in the region by its Self-Defence Forces.

PLA Navy Commissions the First Type 055 Destroyer

China's first 10,000 ton-class Type 055 guided-missile destroyer, which is expected to accompany aircraft carriers in battle groups, was officially commissioned into the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) on 12 January 2020.

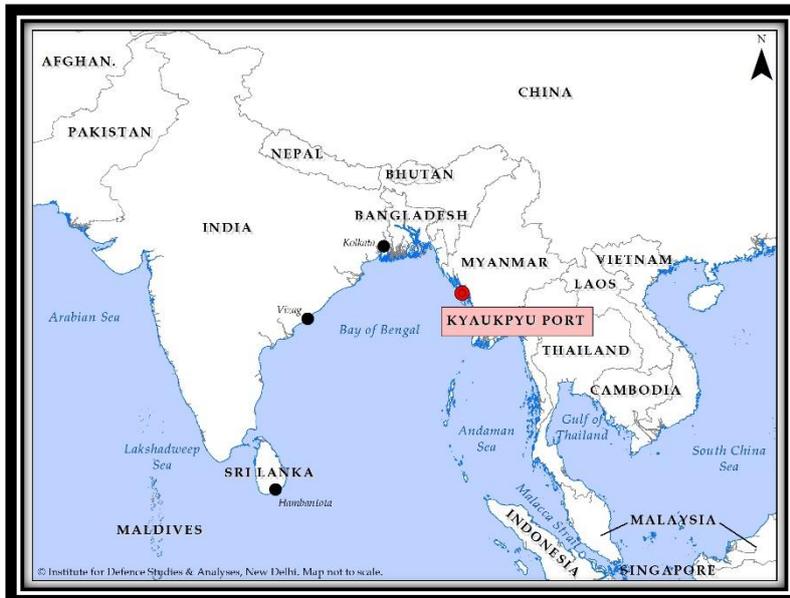


This is the first warship to enter Chinese naval service in 2020. Having a displacement of more than 10,000 tons, the Type 055 is a 180-metre-long and 20-metre-wide guided missile destroyer with 112 vertical launch missile cells capable of launching a combination of surface-to-air, anti-ship, land-attack and anti-submarine missiles.

Five other Type 055 destroyers have been reportedly launched at the Dalian Shipyard in Liaoning Province and the Jiangnan Shipyard in Shanghai. Military analysts predict that China could develop an upgraded version of the Type 055 featuring advanced technologies such as the electromagnetic rail gun.

Xi Jinping's Visit to Myanmar

On 17-18 January 2020, Xi Jinping paid the first state visit to Myanmar by a Chinese President in almost two decades. Before the visit, Xi wrote an article emphasising brotherly (paukphaw) ties and the need “to promote the three pillars of the CMEC [China-Myanmar Economic Corridor], namely the Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone, the China-Myanmar Border Economic Cooperation Zone and the New Yangon City.”



Naypyitaw is, however, cautious, not wishing to overcommit itself and keeping its option open to recalibrate relations in the future.

China and Myanmar concluded 33 agreements during Xi's visit. The joint statement noted the broad understanding to promote “comprehensive strategic cooperation” and build the “Myanmar-China Community with a Shared Future.”

One of the agreements concluded during the visit was the finalisation of the USD 1.3 billion Kyaukpyu port project. When completed, this facility on the Bay of Bengal will provide China a direct link to oil supplies from the Middle East since Kyaukpyu is at one end of a massive oil and natural gas pipeline network that runs all the way to Kunming in southwest China's Yunnan province. The strategic nature of this link stems from the fact that it will help China avoid the vulnerable Malacca Strait athwart which is located the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Chinese influence, which had declined during the last several years of Myanmar's opening up, has begun to revive in the wake of Western criticism of Myanmar's treatment of its Rohingya community. The Chinese footprint in Myanmar is quite large, with 18 hydro-power projects, jade and ruby mining, timber logging, and large property investments in building malls and apartment blocks. In addition, several hundred ‘Confucius Institutes’ have sprung up, with many of these now reworked as computer schools and funded by local Chinese communities.

Tibetan Policy and Support Act of 2019

On 28 January 2020, the US House of Representative passed The Tibetan Policy and Support Act of 2019 (TPSA, 2019). The Act modifies and reauthorizes the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002. It is part of the series of China-specific acts that the US Congress has passed in recent months such as The Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy

Act of 2019 and The Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2019, which have contributed to the worsening of Sino-US relations. TPSA requires closer monitoring as it takes a clear position on the Dalai Lama succession issue.

The Act calls upon the US government to protect the human rights and cultural identity of Tibetans, promote unconditional dialogue between China and the Dalai Lama, establish a consulate in Lhasa, prevent Chinese interference in Buddhist matters including selection of the Dalai Lama, and urge Nepal to cooperate with the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees to provide documentation to Tibetan refugees on its territory.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson has rejected the US action as a breach of “international law and basic norms governing international relations” and gross interference in “China's internal affairs”.