

Pakistan Pressured by Saudi Arabia and UAE to Recognize and Accept the State of Israel

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Putting aside the relics of past Cold War theatrics, Pakistan has been consistently struggling to advance peace and justice in the world. The struggle though has intensified. Pakistan currently experiences unprecedented pressure from the conservative Gulf monarchies of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as well as the United States, to accept the Apartheid State of Israel. The Pakistani people would never succumb to this pressure. They have always stood in solidarity with the Palestinians and the Kashmiris, and no amount of coercion now is going to diminish their resolve. There is hardly a more pro-Palestinian population than the Pakistanis.

The matter should dare not have even arisen before Islamabad, about normalizing ties with a state that militarily occupies, brutalizes, and prevents justice to an occupied people. Israel has effectively destroyed any iota of a 'peace process,' has expanded settler-colonization of the West Bank and Arab East Jerusalem and ruthlessly displaced the Palestinians for decades. The Gaza Strip has been converted into an 'open air prison,' regulating all aspects of the lives of these people who are subject to routine Israeli bombardment and massacres. The 'normalization' then is that of deep injustice, sheer violence, ceaseless land theft and constant humiliation.

Indeed, Palestine is a symbol of an ongoing struggle for justice and dignity in a world where oppression of the weak reigns strong. Pakistan cannot bow down to these pressures if it is to maintain the moral authority to stand against any form of oppression, including critically that of India's in Kashmir. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, cannot follow the morally bankrupt path of his predecessors. He would be morally accountable to the Pakistani population, as well to the Palestinians, and everyone who has struggled for decades to end this oppression.

Islamabad not only has to take into consideration the wishes of its own people, but also the objective interests of the state. There are many compelling reasons as to why Islamabad should stand firm on its stance. There are several Gulf countries, like Qatar and Kuwait, that are already standing strong and are not moving an inch towards recognition.

Even if one puts aside the question of the inherent immorality of Israeli barbarism towards the suffering Palestinians, from the point of view of pure self-interested realpolitik – there is nothing to be gained by Pakistan here. Giving into these threats is not going to benefit Pakistan. It is certainly not going to give any leverage to Pakistan with Israel or India, rather, the vice versa will occur. It is laughable to believe that recognizing Israel will engender Tel Aviv to jeopardize its deeply intimate friendship with Modi to appease a groveling

Islamabad. The costs for Islamabad, on the other hand will be incalculable: Pakistan will be at an utter loss in maintain its legitimate moral high ground on the issue of Kashmir.

The pressures to normalize, too, will most likely be short-lived. It is just matter of standing strong till it dies out. Once Biden takes over as the President of the United States on January 20, the pressure will diminish. In addition, there are also many powerful countries which do not support recognition. These include Turkey and Iran.

These threats are mostly hollow or far-exaggerated, and lack substance. The power of this UAE-MBS (Saudi Arabia)-Tel Aviv axis is over-stated as their inability to weaken Qatar or defeat the Yemeni resistance can testify. At the same time, Pakistan has diplomatic and security levers against the UAE and Saudi Arabia that it can use strategically to cripple the not-so-subtle configuration of protective military power Islamabad has in the Gulf.

Even if we take some of these possible threats to Pakistan on face value, and assume that Pakistani workers will be expelled from Saudi Arabia and potentially the UAE, the loss of remittances is likely to be harmful to the Pakistan economy in the short-term, but also be harmful to the UAE and Saudi Arabia – since it will take at least 1-2 years to replace those workers. It is to be noted that the percentage of these workers is quite high. In the medium and the long run, the return of these workers to Pakistan could reverse the brain drain, reduce reliance on remittances, and create opportunities within the country itself. This could potentially create a policy window for greater reform. Pakistan can use this moment of humiliating pressure and threats by ostensibly ‘brotherly Muslim countries’ as a catalyst to re-set Pakistan’s foreign, domestic and socio-economic relations, as well as re-build its economic structure.

The Pakistani state needs to unequivocally proclaim that recognition of the current Israeli Apartheid state is simply off the table. Prime Minister Imran Khan needs to mobilize the people and take the National Assembly into confidence about the intense pressures being put on Islamabad to submit to this act of treachery. The military high command should also be informed and persuaded of the dangers to Pakistan at this critical junction by being on the wrong side of history once again — when in fact we thought we had finally escaped those archaic and reactionary winds that blew us in that direction the previous decades of Pakistan’s short history as a nation.

Defending Palestine’s rights in the current conjuncture, means resisting the Palestinization of Kashmir, defending Kashmir’s rights means preventing Pakistan from becoming Balkanized like Palestine. Moral imperatives, religious obligation, Islamic solidarity and national interests are all aligned to reject any move to recognize Tel Aviv. To do otherwise would be a betrayal of not only the Palestinians, but country of Pakistan, its people, its future – and would also be a rejection of our faith.

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