

The 'Deal of the Century': Revealed and Reviled

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*Last week, on January 28, US **President Donald Trump** officially revealed his long-awaited “Deal of the Century”: The plan for resolving the century-old Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Except for some additional details, the lengthy document did not add much to what had already been leaked, or even implemented, over the last three years. And yet, the content has been shocking and widely criticised.*

The timing of the declaration was seen by some critics as an opportunistic move to:

First, salvage two in-crisis leaders from problems they are facing at home: Trump’s impeachment and Netanyahu’s corruption case. (In fact Netanyahu was indicted on corruption charges while in Washington awaiting the announcement ceremony of the deal; and second, help Netanyahu in his battle in the third Israeli general election due on March 2 next, as well as Trump’s bid for a second presidential term at the end of this year.

If so, nothing could be more distressing than when the destiny of an entire people, the Palestinian people, is immorally, illegally and inhumanely utilised for such pure personal purposes.

Obviously, the deal’s announcement date, as well as its content, which was meant to succeed the March 2 Israeli election day so that it would not influence the outcome, was brought forward to extricate Netanyahu out of his legal crisis.

The highly biased content of the deal confirms previous predictions that it was entirely authored in Israel by the most hardline extremist and racist settler elements there; the elements that openly claim Palestine as the land of the Jewish people with no place for the Palestinians in it.

It is precisely for this reason, that it was Israel, not the Palestinians which had been obstructing peace efforts for the last 50 years. It is Israel which never negotiated with the purpose of reaching a final settlement; in favour of using protracted negotiations for buying time to create more irreversible facts on the ground, eliminating any possibility of the rise of a Palestinian state at any time. It is Israel, not the Palestinians, which sabotaged all US efforts and initiatives for meaningful negotiations; remember William Rogers’ initiative, President Carter’s efforts, Jim Baker’s, John Kerry’s and others. It is Israel which rejected and ignored hundreds of UN resolutions, including Security Council Resolution 242 of November 1967. It is Israel which rejected the King Fahed initiative in 1982 and the Arab Peace initiative, which offered it peace, recognition and normal relations with all the Arab and the Muslim states in 2002.

The Palestinians and the concerned Arab states did reject some peace plans but for the right

reasons. They were not supposed to accept any offer that did not recognise their legitimate rights as defined and endorsed by international law. There is nothing abnormal here in any negotiations.

The striking reality, however, is that the Palestinians have been overly extravagant in accepting much less than they should have along their arduous struggle for a peaceful settlement, severely compromising their territorial and political rights for the sake of a peace settlement they never had.

The Palestinians agreed to settle for 22 per cent of the Palestinian territory, the West Bank and Gaza, along the so-called 1967 lines; they agreed to a swap of territory and border alterations, thus reducing even further the 22 per cent, they then agreed to the Oslo accords which actually placed the Palestinians under endless and harsh Israeli occupation, that controlled their lives, their economy, tax collection and restriction of movement.

Under Oslo, Israel continued to colonise the Palestinian land, planting more than 800,000 settlers in more than 120 settlements built illegally on Palestinian occupied land on the 22 per cent, the West Bank.

Under Oslo, the Palestinian Authority agreed to the unique preposterous arrangement of “security cooperation”; the formation of a Palestinian police force not to protect their own people from daily aggressive Israeli practices or settler attacks on defenseless Palestinians’ property, farms and homes; not to defend their land which was systematically confiscated and colonised, but to protect their occupiers and the settlers and to prevent the Palestinians from practising their legitimate right to even defend themselves, or to reject the humiliation and resist the occupation. The recruited Palestinian youth for the security cooperation police force were educated, trained and armed, to do just that: Defend their occupiers from their own people. There is no precedent in history where the oppressed victims of such a ruthless occupation become the guardians and the protectors of their oppressors. Only in Palestine. Only by the Palestinians, who are now condemned by their wise Arab brothers and a chorus of pseudo experts for missing opportunities by rejecting repeated offers for peace from their generous occupiers.

But that is not all. The Palestinians have been engaged in sterile negotiations for more than five decades. The late Yaser Arafat negotiated extensively with the US, with Europe and all others. He agreed to a settlement on the basis of the 1967 borders. He agreed to renounce violence. He agreed to modify the Palestinian National Charter by removing any language seen as hostile to Israel. He accepted UN resolutions, including SC Resolution 242. He published an article in the NY Times condemning terrorism, of which he, and his organisation, were accused. He accepted Oslo with all the disastrous implications of that terrible accord. Rather than insisting on liberating his people by ending the occupation, Arafat agreed to join his occupied people and spend his last years under the very occupation he committed himself, and his organisation, the Palestine Liberation Organisation, to fight. Arafat, who started his struggle by committing to liberate all Palestine, ended up, under Oslo, agreeing to Gaza and Jericho as a modest beginning.

Successor **Mahmoud Abbas** also negotiated endlessly and tirelessly with every Israeli Prime Minister during the past 25 years. He negotiated with the Americans, Europeans and every country in the world. He pledged to only negotiate and not to ever allow his people to resist their occupiers for any reason even if by legitimate means, and he still does.

As a matter of fact, Abbas was harshly criticised for being excessively forthcoming for negotiating under uneven circumstances; sometimes under humiliating conditions. He over did it to the point where the Israelis were always encouraged to expand their demands and to add new conditions. In the meantime, and under the convenient cover of sterile negotiations, they continued with their colonisation schemes without fear of any consequences. From an early stage, Abbas was clearly taken for granted.

Abbas has only redeemed himself, partially though, when, for a change, he finally decided to say “no”, to sever any contacts with the current US administration and to end the charade of pointless negotiations, following President Trump’s measures to liquidate the Palestine question; measures such as the decision to grant Jerusalem to Israel, to punish the Palestinians financially and to cut aid from UNRWA in the hope that the termination of UNRWA would also put an end to the Palestinian refugees’ rights for return and compensation.

These measures and more are now incorporated in the revealed terms of the White House “Deal of the Century”. Now that the world is face to face with the most biased, the most blatant, unjust, illegal, provocative, absurd and dangerous terms of the US peace plan, everyone, not just Abbas, is saying no.

All Palestinians are rejecting the plan and ready to fight it. The Arab League concluded a meeting on the matter last Saturday with a unanimous declaration strongly rejecting the plan, while reconfirming the Palestinian rights for statehood and liberation. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has also issued a similar rejection following a meeting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia few days ago. The UN is opposing the plan, as are many other world powers, in addition to credible Jewish voices in the US and in Israel. Former Israeli officials have expressed serious concern about ominous consequences of the deal on the Israeli scene. Israelis demonstrated in Tel Aviv earlier this week to voice their rejection under the banner “Peace plan, not annexation deal”. They chanted: “Annexation is a disaster, no peace no security”. Israeli Arabs organised huge demonstrations as well rejecting the deal and warning against transfer.

What was revealed on January 28 is not a deal, or a peace proposal, or a plan. It is an endorsement of Israel’s extremist position that aims at eradicating the Palestinians from their homeland once and for all. Clearly the plan was designed to be rejected by the Palestinians, so that they would be held responsible for missing another opportunity for peace and missing also their share as very poorly defined in the deal, the imagined Palestinian state, while the Israelis would then be free to grab most of the territory.

The US president has no legal authority or right to abolish international law and decide on his own to illegally and unilaterally grant Palestinian and Syrian occupied lands to a usurper state.

The deal has no chance to redraw the lines or to be implemented, as it has no legal validity, and it will not be helped except by the extremist Israeli elements and those who support them, mainly in the US.

Israel, therefore, may or may not rush to annex the West Bank areas designated in the deal: The settlements and the Jordan Valley. But even if that happens, it will not change the existing reality on the ground. The areas in question are already under Israeli occupation, for more than 50 years now. Occupied Jerusalem and the Golan Heights were already

annexed by Israel for more than 40 years. The American permission for Israel to annex them again may only comfort Israel into believing that its illegal annexation is gaining validation from an important world power. It does not. The occupation cannot be legalised simply by an illegal verbal decision of a third unauthorised party.

The deal is also dangerous, for Israel in particular, but for the entire region as well. It may, as many have already feared, plunge the region into prolonged waves of violence, on top of what is happening already. The situation is quite explosive with patience running out as a result of mounting injustice, prolonged occupation and hopelessness. The deal could spark a wild fire and, let us hope it does not.

The Palestinians must revise their strategies and rearrange their priorities. It is time that they demand the end of the occupation rather than live with it as they have been doing, particularly since Oslo. The problem did not start with the "Deal of the Century" and will not end without it. It is the occupation that should be removed first. The other Palestinian rights should also be dealt with within the UN system, nowhere else.

Finally: the Palestinian case is only part of the larger Arab-Israeli conflict. The "peace process" that started with the Madrid Peace conference 30 years ago, envisioned a "peace settlement" of the Arab-Israeli conflict in its entirety, with Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine. Egypt had already reached a settlement in 1979. The goal was a just, a comprehensive and a permanent peace. Where is the "Deal of the Century" from That?

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