

Duh, Jared! So Who Built the PA as a 'Police State'?

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Maybe something good will come out of the Trump plan, after all. By pushing the Middle East peace process to its logical conclusion, Donald Trump has made crystal clear something that was supposed to have been obscured: that no US administration has ever really seen peace as the objective of its "peacemaking".

The current White House is no exception – it has just been far more incompetent at concealing its joint strategy with the Israelis. But that is what happens when a glorified used-car salesman, Donald Trump, and his sidekick son-in-law, the schoolboy-cum-businessman Jared Kushner, try selling us the “deal of the century”. Neither, it seems, has the political or diplomatic guile normally associated with those who rise to high office in Washington.

During an [interview](#) with CNN’s Fareed Zakaria this week, Kushner dismally failed to cloak the fact that his “peace” plan was designed with one goal only: to screw the Palestinians over.

The real aim is so transparent that even Zakaria couldn’t stop himself from pointing it out. In CNN’s words, he noted that “no Arab country currently satisfies the requirements Palestinians are being expected to meet in the next four years – including ensuring freedom of press, free and fair elections, respect for human rights for its citizens, and an independent judiciary.”

Trump’s senior adviser suddenly found himself confronted with the kind of deadly, unassailable logic usually overlooked in CNN coverage. Zakaria observed:

“Isn’t this just a way of telling the Palestinians you’re never actually going to get a state because ... if no Arab countries today [are] in a position that you are demanding of the Palestinians before they can be made a state, effectively, it’s a killer amendment?”

Indeed it is.

In fact, the “[Peace to Prosperity](#)” document unveiled last week by the White House is no more than a list of impossible preconditions the Palestinians must meet to be allowed to sit down with the Israelis at the negotiating table. If they don’t do so within four years, and quickly reach a deal, the very last slivers of their historic homeland – the parts not already seized by Israel – can be grabbed too, with US blessing.

Preposterous conditions

Admittedly, all Middle East peace plans in living memory have foisted these kinds of prejudicial conditions on the Palestinians. But this time many of the preconditions are so patently preposterous – contradictory even – that the usually pliable corporate press corps are embarrassed to be seen ignoring the glaring inconsistencies.

The CNN exchange was so revealing in part because Kushner was triggered by Zakaria’s observation that the Palestinians had to become a model democracy – a kind of idealised Switzerland, while still under belligerent Israeli occupation – before they could be considered responsible enough for statehood.

How was that plausible, Zakaria hinted, when Saudi Arabia, despite its appalling human rights abuses, nonetheless remains a close strategic US ally, and Saudi leaders continue to be intimates of the Trump business empire? No one in Washington is seriously contemplating removing US recognition of Saudi Arabia because it is a head-chopping, women-hating, journalist-killing religious fundamentalist state.

But Zakaria could have made an even more telling point – was he not answerable to CNN executives. There are also hardly any western states that would pass the democratic, human rights-respecting threshold set by the Trump plan for the Palestinians. Nor, of course, would Israel.

Think of Britain’s [flouting](#) last year of a ruling by the International Court of Justice in The Hague that the Chagos Islanders must be allowed to return home decades after the UK expelled them so the US could build a military base on their land. Or the Windrush scandal, when it was revealed that a UK government “hostile environment” policy was used to illegally deport British citizens to the Caribbean because of the colour of their skin.

Or what about the US evading due process by holding prisoners offshore at Guantanamo? Or its use of [torture](#) against Iraqi prisoners, or its reliance on [extraordinary rendition](#), or its [extrajudicial assassinations](#) using drones overseas, including against its own citizens?

Or for that matter, its jailing and extortionate [fining](#) of whistleblower Chelsea Manning, despite the Obama administration granting her clemency. US officials want to force her to testify against Wikileaks founder Julian Assange for his role in publishing leaks of US war crimes committed in Iraq, including the shocking [Collateral Murder](#) video.

And while we’re talking about Assange and about Iraq...

Would the records of either the US or UK stand up to scrutiny if they were subjected to the same standards now required of the Palestinian leadership.

Impertinent questions

But let’s fast forward to the heart of the matter. Angered by Zakaria’s impertinence at mildly questioning the logic of the Trump plan, Kushner let rip.

He called the Palestinian Authority a “police state” and one that is “not exactly a thriving democracy”. It would be impossible, he added, for Israel to make peace with the Palestinians until the Palestinians, not Israel’s occupying army, changed its ways. It was time for the Palestinians to prioritise human rights and democracy, while at the same time submitting completely to Israel’s belligerent, half-century occupation that violates their rights and undermines any claims Israel might have to being a democracy.

Kushner said:

“If they [the Palestinians] don’t think that they can uphold these standards, then I don’t think we can get Israel to take the risk to recognize them as a state, to allow them to take control of themselves, because the only thing more dangerous than what we have now is a failed state.”

Let’s take a moment to unpack that short statement to examine its many conceptual confusions.

First, there’s the very obvious point that “police states” and dictatorships are not “failed states”. Not by a long shot. In fact, police states and dictatorships are usually the very opposite of failed states. Iraq was an extremely able state under Saddam Hussein, in terms both of its ability to provide welfare and educational services and of its ruthless, brutal efficiency in crushing dissent.

Iraq only became a failed state when the US illegally invaded and executed Saddam, leaving a local leadership vacuum that sucked in an array of competing actors who quickly made Iraq ungovernable.

Oppressive by design

Second, as should hardly need pointing out, the PA can’t be a police state when it isn’t even a state. After all, that’s where the Palestinians are trying to get to, and Israel and the US are blocking the way. It is obviously something else. What that “something else” is brings us to the third point.

Kushner is right that the PA is increasingly authoritarian and uses its security forces in oppressive ways – because that’s exactly what it was set up to do by Israel and the US.

Palestinians had assumed that the Oslo accords of the mid-1990s would lead to the creation of a sovereign state at the completion of that five-year peace process. But that never happened. Denied statehood ever since, the PA now amounts to nothing more than a security contractor for the Israelis. Its unspoken job is to make the Palestinian people submit to their permanent occupation by Israel.

The self-defeating deal contained in Oslo’s “land for peace” formula was this: the PA would build Israeli trust by crushing all resistance to the occupation, and in return Israel would agree to hand over more territory and security powers to the PA.

Bound by its legal obligations, the PA had two possible paths ahead of it: either it would become a state under Israeli licence, or it would serve as a Vichy-like regime suppressing Palestinian aspirations for national liberation. Once the US and Israel made clear they would deny the Palestinians statehood at every turn, the PA’s fate was sealed.

Put another way, the point of Oslo from the point of view of the US and Israel was to make the PA an efficient, permanent police state-in-waiting, and one that lacked the tools to threaten Israel.

And that’s exactly what was engineered. Israel refused to let the Palestinians have a proper army in case, bidding to gain statehood, that army turned its firepower on Israel. Instead a

US army general, Keith Dayton, was appointed to oversee the [training](#) of the Palestinian police forces to help the PA better repress internal dissent – those Palestinians who might try to exercise their right in international law to resist Israel’s belligerent occupation.

Presumably, it is a sign of that US programme’s success that Kushner can now describe the PA as a police state.

Freudian slip

In his CNN interview, Kushner inadvertently highlighted the Catch-22 created for the Palestinians. The Trump “peace” process penalises the Palestinian leadership for their very success in achieving the targets laid out for them in the Oslo “peace” process.

Resist Israel’s efforts to deprive the Palestinians of statehood and the PA is classified as a **terrorist entity** and denied statehood. Submit to Israel’s dictates and oppress the Palestinian people to prevent them demanding statehood and the PA is classified as a **police state** and denied statehood. Either way, statehood is unattainable. Heads I win, tails you lose.

Kushner’s use of the term “failed state” is revealing too, in a Freudian slip kind of way. Israel doesn’t just want to steal some Palestinian land before it creates a small, impotent Palestinian state. Ultimately, what Israel envisions for the Palestinians is no statehood at all, not even of the compromised, collaborationist kind currently embodied by the PA.

An unabashed partisan

Kushner, however, has done us a favour inadvertently. He has given away the nature of the US bait-and-switch game towards the Palestinians. Unlike Dennis Ross, Martin Indyk and Aaron David Miller – previous American Jewish diplomats overseeing US “peace efforts” – Kushner is not pretending to be an “honest broker”. He is transparently, unabashedly partisan.

In an earlier CNN interview, one last week with Christiane Amanpour, Kushner showed just how personal is his antipathy towards the Palestinians and their efforts to achieve even the most minimal kind of statehood in a tiny fraction of their historic homeland.

He sounded more like a jilted lover, or an irate spouse forced into couples therapy, than a diplomat in charge of a complex and incendiary peace process. He struggled to contain his bitterness as he extemporised a well-worn but demonstrably false Israeli talking-point that the Palestinians “never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity”.

He told Amanpour: “They’re going to screw up another opportunity, like they’ve screwed up every other opportunity that they’ve ever had in their existence.”

Jared Kushner, senior adviser to the President, says the White House's Middle East plan is "a great deal" and if Palestinians reject it, "they're going to screw up another opportunity, like they've screwed up every other opportunity that they've ever had in their existence." pic.twitter.com/ABAI3gKjig

— CNN (@CNN) [January 28, 2020](#)

The reality is that Kushner, like the real author of the Trump plan, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, would prefer that the Palestinians had never existed. He would rather this endless peace charade could be discarded, freeing him to get on with enriching himself with his Saudi pals.

And if the Trump plan can be made to work, he and Netanyahu might finally get their way.

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This article first appeared on Jonathan Cook's blog: <https://www.jonathan-cook.net/blog/>

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