

How the Trump Administration Is Pressuring Palestine

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Nothing was said in the agreements of either Camp David or Oslo about the construction of Israeli settlements in occupied territory. Levy considers this a “critical mistake” in the Oslo agreements and a “trap” that the Palestinians fell into. The enjoyment of additional living space at the expense of the Palestinians who were already there, backed by the PA’s auxiliary security function helping to keep rejectionist violence under control, has made it all the more comfortable for many Israelis to continue the supposedly temporary arrangements in perpetuity, and never to define their own country’s final boundaries.

As enough time goes by, the temporary gets treated more and more as permanent. Last year marked fifty years since the beginning of the Israeli occupation. This month marks forty years since Camp David and twenty-five years since Oslo. Entire generations have grown up in the interim. Not only the passage of time but also the Israeli colonization project in the West Bank have made a viable Palestinian state increasingly unfeasible. Israeli leaders—including ministers in Netanyahu’s government, and when he is talking to Israeli audiences, Netanyahu himself—have become quite open and frank that they will never agree to a Palestinian state.

U.S. Influence

The Trump administration’s policies that bow totally to Israeli government desires have emboldened that government in both its words and its actions. The administration has given new meaning to the term “take off the table” in international conflicts. As the Trump administration uses it, the term means acceding entirely to one side’s position while getting nothing in return and ignoring interests of the other side.

The administration’s most recent moves regarding Palestinian refugees have highlighted how indefinite perpetuation of a temporary arrangement can be part of an effort to take an issue “off the table” in another way. The administration says only those Palestinians originally driven from their homes (during Israel’s founding war seventy years ago or the Six-Day War fifty-one years ago) should count as refugees, and their descendants should not. Contrary to Israeli claims, counting descendants as refugees is [standard practice](#) in defining other refugee populations around the world. But if you don’t count them, then just let enough years go by and—bingo—no more refugees, no more refugee issue, and no need to discuss something like “right of return.” Of course, in the real world, neither people nor whole nationalities vanish that way, and neither do their national aspirations and the trouble

that ensues when those aspirations are suppressed.

The Trump administration claims that its collective punishment of Palestinians, including its termination of funding for humanitarian assistance and closing of the PLO office in Washington, is intended to induce Palestinians to negotiate. But Palestinian leaders are not refusing to negotiate; they are refusing to do so on terms dictated by the Trump administration, which has so clearly forfeited any claim to be an honest broker, or that are based on their side [preemptively conceding](#) on major issues such as the status of Jerusalem.

Amid the years of claims and counterclaims about which side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is most responsible for the ostensible goal of Camp David and Oslo never being realized, the question of who most wants to negotiate is rather simple. Look for the side that, in addition to having the power to change things on the ground by itself, has grown comfortable with indefinite perpetuation of a supposedly temporary status quo. That's the side that doesn't want to negotiate. The side that is suffering most under that status quo and that is powerless to change it by itself is the side that does.

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