

Israel's Biggest Crime against Palestine Is Occupation Itself

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***Edu Montesanti** speaks to **Daoud Kuttab** about the Israeli occupation of Palestine.*

***Daoud Kuttab** is an award-winning Palestinian journalist. In this conversation, journalist and author Edu Montesanti speaks to Kuttab about the future of U.S.-Israel relations under U.S. President Donald Trump, mainstream international media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and challenges to a peace agreement.*

Edu Montesanti: How do you see the meeting between President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Feb. 15, especially the following observations by the U.S. president: "I'm looking at two-state and one-state" formulations, Mr. Trump said during a White House news conference with Mr. Netanyahu. "I like the one that both parties like. I'm very happy with the one that both parties like. I can live with either one"?



Protesters shout "Free Palestine" during a march in midtown Manhattan, New York, July 9, 2014. | Photo: Reuters

Daoud Kuttab: I think that meeting and that statement reflect the usual American-Israeli attempts to solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict simply by pushing both sides to work things out, a solution that favors the powerful. It fits the saying "might is right not right is might." The idea of a US president agreeing to a one-state solution less than 20 years after President Clinton insisted on the PLO to amend their charter to remove the idea of a one-state solution shows how the Americans are not serious about genuine peace.

Why cannot Israel and the Palestinians decide alone the question? Why do Palestinians need a third party to get an agreement?

It would work if there was agreement on the reference point but when you have the powerful side, Israel controlling the areas this means that an agreement will be dictated by the powerful. As the saying goes possession is two-thirds of the law. Also the third party here, the U.S., is part of the problem since they fund Israel to the tune of US\$3-4 billion a year plus give Israel protection in the U.N. If the U.S. was not so involved in defending the Israelis it might be a different issue.

The passage of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 voted on Dec. 23 last year — condemning the Israeli settlements as a flagrant violation of international law and a major impediment to the achievement of a two-state solution — changes nothing on the

ground between Israel and the Palestinians. U.N. member states “agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council,” according to the U.N. Charter. Human rights and the international community also condemns the Israeli settlements and military attacks against Palestinians.

As you observed in (my article) “U.S. and Israel join forces to bury Palestinian statehood,” “ever since the 1967 occupation, the United Nations Security Council has repeatedly expressed the illegality of the occupation, as in the preamble of Resolution 242 ‘emphasising inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war.’” Why nothing changes year by year, massacre after massacre?

Because of this one-sided U.S. policy that refuses to support international law and refuses to allow Israel to be sanctioned the same way Russia was sanctioned for its occupation of Crimea.

You know the Western media distorts the facts involving this massacre against Palestinians, Daoud. Please number the crimes or at least some of them committed by Israel.

The biggest crime is the occupation itself, then comes the illegal settlement and then the restriction on movement and the collective punishment in form of house demolitions.

How do you evaluate the Western media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

Western coverage is mixed. While the major issues are covered, the public rarely sees the human side of Palestinians while exaggerating the human suffering of Israelis.

Professor Avi Shlaim observed days ago: “Sadly, the Palestinians are handicapped by weak leadership and by the internal rivalry between Fatah and Hamas.” Your view on the internal politics among Palestinians, please, Daoud.

I agree about the problem of leadership but this is not the biggest problem. The biggest problem is that the world, especially the western world, treats this conflict differently. The Iraqis were routed out of Kuwait by force when they occupied it, Russia is sanctioned for its occupation and here the problem is not the Israelis but Palestinian incitement or weak leadership. This is not the main problem, the main problem is the occupation.

What could we expect from Arab leaders from now on?

Not much.

What is the solution to the conflict, Daoud?

The solution is for the world to treat Israel like any other aggressor and not give them special treatment.

What are the principal obstacles to a fair agreement and solutions?

Absence of an agreed to reference point. The solution has to be either sharing the land (two state solution) or sharing the power (genuine one state solution with equal rights to all and not the Israeli version of apartheid annexation).

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