

Is Normalization with Israel without a Resolution for Palestine Justifiable?

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Some fifty-three years ago, in 1967, in Khartoum, Sudan, the Arab League met. Then the League adopted the moral high ground "The Three No's": no peace with Israel; no recognition of Israel; and, no negotiation with Israel. But today these moral principles are too costly to sustain for Sudan.

Sudan is in deep economic difficulties, where petrol queues run parallel to bread queues. The years long US sanctions against it have left the country near paralysed unable to access loans from foreign lenders. It is, too, part of the US' terror sponsoring countries list. So desperate is Sudan that its transitional government has abandoned the nation's moral principles to survive. It is the third country, after the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain to normalise relations with Israel in the recent past.

To believe that the Palestinian problem can be resolved once the Arab-Israel relations are normalised is delusional for the very simple reason that Palestine is not central to the agreement arrived at under the circumstances. Rather, Palestine is mentioned as a marginal issue. But when Israel is a sovereign nation in West Asia recognised by its neighbours, even while it is occupying Palestine and establishing Jewish settlements all over on occupied Palestinian territories, challenging international law with impunity, is the world to believe that Palestine can be restored, a two-state solution realised?

That all parties involved in the recent spate of normalised relations with Israel are unapologetic speaks of a time of flux. UAE and Bahrain are oil rich economies facing a possible threat from a green economic future.

That Pan-Arabism is being eroded, chiselled away bit by bit by US President Donald Trump in the run-up to the presidential elections to please his strongly pro-Israel Christian evangelical support, jeopardises the buffer that has sustained Palestine as a body politic.

Sudan is betraying Palestine at a huge cost, both morally and financially. Sudan will be paying more than US\$330 million to US victims of terrorism but this will be paid off by Saudi Arabia. And for recognising Israel it will be taken off the US list of countries sponsoring terrorism. The US sanctions on it will, too, be lifted. Sudan's opening to Israel is reportedly promoted by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, its two main financiers. This champion of Palestine is defeated by economic impoverishment. Sudan is said to be on the verge of bankruptcy. But yet, the people and the large political parties are not with the transitional government. Why then has Sudan agreed to normalising relations with Israel if this move by the transitional government is not supported by the people?

Some believe that Sudan's economic problems will deliver to the Israelis another "peace" agreement. The US is a deadly bully as its sanctions against Iraq proved. Half a million dead Iraqi children due to US imposed sanctions are considered by its then Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, as an acceptable part of a strategy to decimate Iraq. Few countries are like Cuba having been the victim of US sanctions since the 1960's and surviving the resulting economic harshness. Sudan is not Cuba and a change in leadership in recent months has brought to today's normalisation with Israel. But can a leader yet to be fully legitimised take such a risky decision if the threats of the major political parties in the country come to pass? Could financial gifts of millions of dollars smooth the path? After all investigations showed, the former Sudanese leader, General Omar al-Bashir, was gifted US\$90 million by Saudi King Abdullah.

Now that Joseph Biden is the US President elect will he continue delivering more Arab countries to Israel? Will Saudi Arabia be next as President Trump has hinted? Can Saudi Arabia imperil its position as guardian to Islam's most sacred sites? Granted the very existence of the Saudi royal family is as much a British machination as is Israel, but the Muslim world lends the Saudi royal family its legitimacy. That very fact must surely inhibit its freedom to manoeuvre vis-a-vis Israel. Indeed both the President and Vice President-elect are strongly pro-Israel would it not be better to view the Muslim world as more than Arab. Biden was President Obama's Vice President and if the Iran Deal is to be restored joining the Sunni frontal assault might become an obstacle, if the intention is to re-establish American leadership of the West, if not the world now that China's strength has been irrevocably demonstrated.

There is a sense that the USA under President Trump thinks that Palestine is really a non-issue and that the geopolitics of West Asia can be resolved without direct Palestinian participation. For example, his "deal of the century" was arrived at without even consultations with the Palestinians. His intention is that others who dance to Washington's fiddle may persuade or pressure Palestine into surrender. Unfortunately, signs are that Palestine will not capitulate without a fight. The Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment, Sanction (BDS) movement is fast spreading worldwide. That it has been challenged in Europe and the US is a sign of gathering strength. Then there was the recently suspended, but easily resurrected Great March of Return occurring every Friday for more than a year, a grassroots social movement which included various and diverse groups of Palestinian society.

And even while the UAE and Bahrain normalisation agreements were inked Israel was bombing Gaza on the pretext that HAMAS had fired rockets into Israel. If at all true then obviously HAMAS' claims to be a militia are true. And, of course, Sudan has been accused of facilitating the delivery of arms to HAMAS and its Qassam Brigade from Iran. Israel is wary of militias as the Hezbollah, in Lebanon, has proven itself able to defend Lebanese territory and frustrate Israel's security scheme in the region.

And now that Sudan is a friend of Israel's Palestine is no longer its cause in this respect. And, like **President Uhuru Kenyatta** of Kenya, will the Sudan's Prime Minister, **Abdalla Hamdok** be a guest at a US "friendship" party? Kenyatta was rewarded for his support for Washington when Kenya abstained in voting for the United Nations General Assembly resolution to condemn Trump's embassy move from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

But other Arab governments adamantly stand with Palestine. Qatar, for example, even while

home to a US military base insists that it remains faithful to its Pan Arab position. Will Palestine crumble as Pan Arabism disintegrates? Or can it survive and make the transition to a multipolar world where Zionism can be challenged. For, Zionism is the ideology upon which was built the mass migration of Jews to Palestine to escape European persecution. Zionism it was that depopulated Palestine, firstly, through lies and then physically through genocide and ethnic cleansing, the Nakba or catastrophe of 1948.

But Zionism is a strange political beast. Some argue that it is anti-Semitic and white supremacist. Others claim that it is Jewish supremacist. And then there is Christian Zionism. But many of the early leaders of Israel were atheists or agnostics. The certainty is that Zionist Tel Aviv practices apartheid having declared Israel a Jewish state. Palestinians, the indigenous people, are second class citizens to a people who claim ownership of biblical lands which they had long abandoned and on which the Palestinians have built a four thousand year old history, once a thriving nation of Jews, Christians and Muslims. And, unfortunately, according to the publication Israel Hayom, "Biden is known for his affection for Israel, and his pro-Zionist stances." He has already indicated that the US Embassy will remain in Jerusalem.

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