

Trump Would Do the Palestinians a Favour by Cutting Off Aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA)

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*Like many other Palestinians, I pray and implore God that US **President Donald Trump** makes good on his threat to cut off the Palestinian Authority (PA)'s \$300 million annual grant — and also that the European donors follow suit. For that would mean the collapse of the PA and the Oslo accords that brought it into being in exchange for ceding 80% of Palestine's territory and recognizing the Israeli state.*

Trump took a leaf out of the book of some of the Arab Gulf states on Tuesday night when he took to Twitter to accuse the Palestinians of ingratitude and insubordination.

“We pay the Palestinians HUNDRED OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS a year and get no appreciation or respect. They don't even want to negotiate a long overdue,” he declared. “With the Palestinians no longer willing to talk peace, why should we make any of these massive future payments to them?”

This is something of an inversion of Trump's policy towards the Gulf states. From them, he has been demanding hundreds of billions of dollars in return for their military protection. From the Palestinians and the PA, he is demanding 'concessions' over Jerusalem and the West Bank in exchange for a paltry \$300 million per year. A more shameless act of blackmail is hard to imagine.

Trump excels at this extortionist method of doing business and knows no other way of operating. It is all about deal-making and profit-taking with no regard to morality or values, international law, political considerations or the minimal rights of others. Either submit to the dictates of Netanyahu – as conveyed by Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner – or else.

US aid to the PA is aimed at pacifying the Palestinian people and bribing them to abandon all forms of resistance to the occupation by preoccupying them with seeking to improve their living conditions under the rubric of 'economic peace', while deluging their ruling elite in Ramallah with loans, mortgages, flashy cars and other trappings of luxury.

Living conditions for the majority of Palestinians were much better before the advent of the PA and the signing of the Oslo Accords. They were not more prosperous in material terms, but they upheld the concept of 'bread and dignity', and launched a popular uprising that gained the respect of the entire world, laid bare the inhuman practices of the occupation and put into question the very 'existence' of an Israeli state. That is why Western neo-colonialist minds devised a lifeline for it in the form of the Oslo Accords.

PA spokespersons have said that they will not submit to blackmail and that Jerusalem is not for sale, for however many billions of dollars. These are commendable words. But what really matters is the practical actions that the PA takes to counter these two stances: Israel's, in passing legislation aimed at the ceding of any inch of Jerusalem or the West Bank settlements in any future peace deal; and Washington's, in recognizing the conquest and annexation of the Holy City as the occupation state's capital.

The one step the PA has taken is to invite the Palestine Central Council (PCC) to convene next week — in Ramallah, of all places, under the spears of the occupation — to devise a response to Netanyahu and Trump's 'blackmail'. Its spokesmen — such as chief negotiator **Saeb Erekat** — have also urged countries to move their PA-accredited embassies to East Jerusalem, as though they have a choice in the matter or would be free to do so. What kind of deficient thinking is this?

The PCC is supposed to be the intermediary body between the Palestine National Council — the Palestinian parliament-in-exile — and the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). The latter's mandate expired two decades ago, and the majority of its component factions — with the exception of Fateh and the Popular and Democratic Fronts (PFLP and DFLP) — long ago ceased to have any meaningful following among the Palestinian public. Around half of the PCC's membership has gone to meet its maker, and the other half are waiting their turn and are well past retirement age. Critical views are rarely aired, and are unwelcome on the occasions when they are, for no voice can be allowed to rise above that of the anointed leader Mahmoud Abbas.

Around a year ago, the PCC — meeting in the PA compound in Ramallah — took a headline-grabbing decision to halt security cooperation with Israel. The move was greeted with loud applause, as delegates congratulated each other on the PLO's act of reassertion and on the resultant reversion to resistance to the occupation. But that decision remains a piece of paper in Abbas' desk. Its practical impact was zero.

The Palestinian people long ago lost confidence in the PA and its institutions and leadership. They have been reduced to relying on Trump and his decisions to arouse them from the comatose condition that has afflicted them since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, and to rid them of the PA that has been humiliating, subjugating and selling them illusions for the past 20 years.

Again, we reiterate that we fervently hope that Trump does not back down from his threats, and goes ahead and cuts off his poisoned chalice of aid to the PA. That could deal a death blow to the US' influence in the Middle East and perhaps the entire Islamic world, and signal the start of a new phase in which the Palestinians find their feet again and reunite around a platform of resistance and self-respect, under a different leadership capable of shouldering the historic responsibility.

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