

## **The Deal of the Century Is a Vile Plot and People Should Revolt To Nip It in the Bud**

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When the foundations of international law were laid in 1899 at the Hague Conference, the aim was to prevent wars between states by means of arbitration. When the British Empire decolonized Mandate Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict erupted, international law was of no recourse because there was neither a Palestinian nor a Jewish state. So they tinkered with incoherent rules that we, wrongly, consider to be immutable.

The principles that the founding states of the United Nations, including Syria, drew up in the plan for the partition of Palestine were rejected by both sides. When the Yishuv unilaterally proclaimed the State of Israel and immediately carried out extensive ethnic cleansing (the Nakba), the UN recognized the new state, but sent Count Folke Bernadotte to verify the reality on the spot. He noted Israel's crimes, advocated limiting by two thirds the territory allocated to the Yishuv, but was assassinated by the Lehi of Yitzhak Shamir, before he could present his report in New York. More than 700 General Assembly resolutions and more than 100 Security Council resolutions later, the conflict had escalated and no solution was in sight.

President Trump had imagined that he would be able to square the circle before the end of his mandate. As soon as he was elected, he was mistakenly considered pro-Israel when he is just a New World businessman.

He started from the following observation: Israel ethnically cleansed the territory it self-allocated in 1948. It fought the 1967 war, which it won.

The Palestinians fought the 1970 war with Jordan, the 1973 war with Israel, the 1975 war with Lebanon, the 1990 war with Kuwait, and the 2012 war with Syria, all of which they lost. But neither group intends to assume the consequences of its actions.

The debate has been distorted since Yasser Arafat, refusing to be marginalized by the Madrid process, abandoned the project of a binational State based on equality between Arabs and Jews and violated the 1948 partition plan by signing the Oslo Accords. The principle of the "two-state solution", devised by Yitzhak Rabin, the former ally of the South African apartheid regime, is nothing more than the creation of Palestinian

Bantustans, an extension of what President Jimmy Carter called "Israeli apartheid".

Trump has therefore devised a peace plan that he has begun to implement silently over the past two years.

On December 6, 2017, he recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, without specifying its borders, hoping in vain that the Palestinian Authority would move from Ramallah to East Jerusalem.

He withdrew US funding from UNRWA in order to force the international community to stop sponsoring the status quo. This provoked the fury of the Palestinian Authority and severed diplomatic relations between Ramallah and Washington. As heir to the people who had stolen the land from the Indians, he recognized Israel's conquest of the Syrian Golan, hoping to open negotiations with Damascus, but reaping only the condemnation of 193 States.

He secretly negotiated an agreement between Israel and Hamas that led to the payment of Gaza officials by Qatar.

The document published by the White House this week is presented by its authors as unenforceable because it does not have the support of both parties (page 10). It presents a process in four years, that is to say during the next US presidential term. It is therefore a document for electoral use in the United States, not a final peace plan.

Rather than whining and denouncing a fait accompli, we need to understand where the White House is going, especially since we reject Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights.

Donald Trump is a businessman who has put an unacceptable plan on the table in order to achieve much less, but to achieve peace. He is a disciple of President Andrew Jackson who substituted negotiation for war with the Indians. Certainly, the agreement he signed with the Cherokees was sabotaged by his own army and gave rise to the atrocious episode of the Valley of Tears. But today, the Cherokees are the only Native American people to have survived European immigration as such.

The publication of this document was also a trap into which Benjamin Netanyahu fell headlong. Without waiting, the Israeli Prime Minister loudly welcomed the plan in order to eclipse his competitor, General Beny Gantz. Netanyahu had cause to regret this. All the Arab League states stood united, including Qatar, which is secretly participating in

the plan. The years of Israel's efforts to break the Arab front by relying on Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan and Oman have been wiped out.

After Israeli Channel 13 reported Jan. 23 that the Donald Trump administration would reveal its plan for Middle East peace, Palestinian leaders reiterated their rejection of the so-called deal of the century even before learning of the details.

In the lead up to elections in Israel scheduled for March 2, Trump invited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his political rival Benny Gantz, leader of Blue and White, to visit the White House Jan. 28 for details and unveiling of the deal. With Palestinians publicly rejecting the proposal even before its public presentation, approval of it at some later date appears unlikely and will deepen the current rupture with Washington. According to recent media reports, Abbas is refusing to take Trump's calls.

On Jan. 15 in Ramallah, Fatah deputy leader Mahmoud al-Aloul had said in a meeting with members of the international press that the Palestinian leadership still has no specifics about the plan's proposals, but nonetheless feels certain that it neither includes the establishment of a Palestinian state, East Jerusalem as the capital of that state or the right of return for refugees. For these reasons, he said, the Palestinian leadership will oppose the plan.

On Dec. 19 Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas had told Fatah's Revolutionary Council of his rejection of Trump's deal and of the tremendous pressure he was under by the United States to accept it. Abbas has consistently refused to communicate with Trump's representative to discuss the plan's details despite the negative consequences he stands to suffer.

In a Jan. 23 press statement, Hamas spokesperson Hazem Qassem pledged that his organization would foil any deal. Khalil al-Haya, a top Hamas official, had said at a Jan. 16 press conference that on a recent tour of capitals, Hamas' political bureau chief, Ismail Haniyeh, had sought to raise awareness about the threat that the US proposal poses to the Palestinian cause.

Bassem Naim, former Palestinian health minister and head of the Gaza-based Council of International Relations, told Al-Monitor, "Palestinian reactions to the imminent declaration of the deal of the century are not serious enough. The Palestinians are preoccupied with their internal disputes, and the discussions about the deal are not Palestinian-Israeli or US-Palestinian but rather US-Israeli. Palestinians are present absentees, and they cannot accept the deal of the century, as it does not grant them

components of an independent entity, even if Israelis were to retreat from parts of the West Bank. The deal of the century is not a viable solution, and people should revolt to nip it in the bud.”

One reason the Palestinians oppose Trump's proposal is the belief that it will render the cantonization of the West Bank permanent. Instead of Israeli exploitation of the territories through overt occupation, the deal would uphold the status quo in the West Bank with areas remaining under Israeli military and security control and Palestinian civil administration. It would also strike the Palestinian presence in Jerusalem and maintain Gaza's isolation and the blockade against it.

Wasel Abu Yousef, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee, told Al-Monitor, “The implementation of the deal began before its declaration, when the US declared Jerusalem to be the capital of Israel in December 2017, moved its embassy there in May 2018 and declared Israeli settlements legal in November 2019. It is therefore not surprising that the Palestinians reject the deal without even knowing its details.”

He further stated, “At best, it would give us limited self-rule rather than an independent state. We initially rejected the deal, and we are aware of the repercussions. Even if withdrawals from Palestinian areas take place, they will only give rise to a Palestinian state lacking sovereignty and will maintain Israel's occupation of most West Bank areas.”

Palestinians view the timing surrounding the presentation of the peace proposal, ahead of Israeli elections, as part of the Trump administration's support for the Netanyahu-led right in Israel, given their strategic political alliance. Palestinians also envision the deal as backing Israel's intention to annex Jewish settlements on the West Bank, including in the Jordan Valley, designate the West Bank and Gaza as the territory of a transitional state, New Palestine, and grant Palestinians limited administrative powers.

Mahmoud Mardawi, with Hamas' National Relations Office, told Al-Monitor, “If Israel wants to withdraw from part of the West Bank without the Palestinians' signed approval of the deal, the resistance will take advantage of this without facilitating an Israeli move or participating in it. It is inconceivable to stand in the way of Israel's retreat from an area. Even if the Palestinians have not signed the deal or made commitments to the US and Israel, nothing stops them from benefiting from the potential outcome of the deal.”

Emad Abu Awad, a researcher at the Istanbul-based Vision for Political Development, told Al-Monitor, “The declaration of the deal of the century will put Palestinians, whether Hamas or the [PLO], in a quandary. The [PLO] will not be able to make serious

decisions against the deal, save for condemning it, which might push a current within Fatah to revolt against the official leadership and demand that it take serious stances. Hamas is also in a pickle, as its organizational presence is limited in the West Bank, and in Gaza it cannot take a stand regarding the deal. Add to this that Hamas will not jeopardize its understandings with Israel aimed at improving the situation in Gaza. The Palestinians' stances will not technically affect the deal, as relations between the PA and Hamas are tense, and each will work single-handedly toward a response."

Trump took office in 2017 promising the "deal of the century," and as his deal has been unfolded, the Palestinians have had no serious public reactions to it, except for expressions of anger and condemnation. This is unlikely to change after the proposal's unveiling although its presentation could pave the way for implementation through US-Israeli agreement without the Palestinians' consent, imposing the deal as a fait accompli as with the US actions on Jerusalem and the settlements and suspension of US financial assistance.

Source: volatire