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The End Game: Normalization



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Despite the fallout, there was little that was actually new or shocking about Trump and Netanyahu’s press conference last week. What shocked informed people on all sides of the Palestine issue was Trump’s forthright (if crude, ill-comprehended and oblivious) statement of the truth: that the United States is committed to the Judaization of Palestine and a process of “normalization” between a “greater” Israel and its Arab neighbors that involves a combination of apartheid and physical displacement. All the diplo-speak of Biden and his predecessors that so effectively obfuscated the Americans’ and Israelis’ true policies – gone. Trump is simply incapable of employing the clever phrasing needed to frame racist policies as rational statecraft.

Stepping back from Trump’s crude and stupid remarks, then, we can easily discern the thrust of Israeli/American policy, clear to most of us for years, but is now reaching its culmination in the “normalization” process. This is how it goes:

+ Saudi Arabia, the Jewel in the Crown for completing the Abraham Accords, has conditioned normalization with Israel on a vague, never-to-be-implemented commitment to a “pathway” to a Palestinian state at some indeterminate future date. No details or conditions necessary; for example, would the Palestinian state be territorially contiguous, genuinely sovereign and economically viable? Why spend the political capital to get into problematic details over an eventuality that “everyone knows” (to quote Leonard Cohen) will never materialize? The other Arab states that have already normalized with Israel – Egypt, Jordan, the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco – haven’t even made that symbolic demand.

+ Arab government collusion with Netanyahu and Trump (& Biden, this is not just a Republican plan) empowers Israel to define less what the Palestinian Bantustan-“state” would look like (who cares?) and more the expanded Israel they would be normalizing. The parameters are clear: they were set out in detailed maps back in 2020 (see below). “Israel” is defined as the state of Israel in its 1967 borders PLUS its settlements. Israel thus expands to 85% of historic Palestine while the Palestinian “state” is reduced to three enclaves in the West Bank and an uninhabitable Gaza. For “security” reasons Israel also controls the borders (Palestine will not have a border with an Arab country), the airspace and even internal movement between the enclaves. No territorial contiguity, no sovereignty, no economic viability, and no capacity to bring the refugees home. A Palestinian Bantustan within an all-encompassing Israeli apartheid regime.

The fact that the normalization process is nearing its completion explains Israel’s push to ethnically cleanse Area C , the 62% of the West Bank where its settlements are located, and which is planned to be annexed. The most violent Israeli settler youth have been unleashed on Palestinian communities; indeed, they have been recruited into a special IDF unit called Desert Frontier where they join other army units in driving Palestinian farmers and shepherds from their villages and lands. More than 50 rural communities have been abandoned since October 7th; more than 40 new settlement “outposts” established to replace them. All to establish the “facts on the ground” that will then be normalized.

Whether a couple million Gazans are relocated semi-voluntarily or by force, or whether they just rot there under some puppet Palestinian or Arab authority makes no difference. Israel has no strategic interest in Gaza and, a few settlers aside, no interest in integrating it into a Greater Israel. It is marginal and expendable. Israel’s main interest is removing 2.3 million Palestinians from its direct rule, then placing the remaining three million of its West Bank Bantustan under some Palestinian Authority-type subcontractor. Thus a Greater Israel with a Jewish majority of 70-80% covering all of historic Palestine.

+ The only actual condition imposed on Israel by the US and Saudi Arabia for the normalization process to go ahead is industrial quiet, quietizing the Palestinian issue so that it simply drops out of sight. Thus Israel's intense campaign of pacification, beginning with eliminating Hamas in Gaza, the last bastion of effective resistance, but now spilling over into the West Bank where Israel is "Gaza-fying" the Jenin, Tulkarm and Nablus refugee camps as well as other pockets of resistance. (With, sickeningly, the active support of its collaborationist Palestinian Authority, desperate to "prove" to Israel that it is capable of taking control of Gaza.)

+ Then, with all this in place, normalization. A "Greater" Israel is recognized by Saudi Arabia, much of the Arab and Muslim world and the United States, the Palestinians regulated to "a problem" that demands little more than periodic lip-service. To be sure, this will be sold as the "two-state solution" the international community has long supported, but let's call it by its real name: two-state apartheid.

Settler colonialism ends not with victory but by being normalized. For normalization means closure. Once an expanded Israel and its apartheid regime is recognized by the international community – if not formally by much of Europe, the BRICS Bloc and the Global South, then certainly de facto, which for Israel is good enough – there is little political space for the Palestinians to continue pushing their cause. Completion of the Abraham Accords represents the greatest threat to the Palestinians since the 1948 Nakba. Opposing it as long as normalization does not mean restoring to the Palestinians their national rights should be our priority.

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