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## **From Gaza to Syria: The Unyielding Reality of Israeli Settler Colonialism**



Image by Cole Keister.

The conversation on settler colonialism must not be limited to academic discussion. It is a political reality, clearly demonstrated in the everyday behavior of Israel.

Israel is not merely an expansionist regime historically; it remains actively so today. Additionally, the core of Israeli political discourse, both past and present, revolves around territorial expansion.

Frequently, we succumb to the trap of blaming such language on a specific set of right-wing and extremist politicians or on a particular US administration. The truth is vastly different: the Israeli Zionist political discourse, though it may change in style, remains fundamentally unchanged throughout time.

Zionist leaders have always associated the establishment and expansion of their state with the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians, later referred to in Zionist literature as the “transfer.”

Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern political Zionism, wrote in his diary about the ethnic cleansing of the Arab population from Palestine:

“We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it any employment in our own country... Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly.”

It is unclear what happened to Herzl’s grand employment scheme aimed at “spiriting” the population of Palestine across the region. What we know is that the so-called “penniless population” resisted the Zionist project in numerous ways. Ultimately, the depopulation of Palestine occurred through force, culminating in the Nakba, the Catastrophe of 1948.

The discourse of the erasure of the Palestinian people has been the shared foundation among all Israeli officials and governments, though it has been expressed in different ways. It has always had a material component, manifesting in the slow but decisive takeover of Palestinian homes in the West Bank, the confiscation of farms, and the constant construction of “military zones.”

Despite Israeli claims, this “incremental genocide” is not directly linked to the nature and degree of Palestinian resistance. Jenin and Masafer Yatta illustrate this clearly.

Take, for example, the ongoing ethnic cleansing in the northern West Bank, which, according to UNRWA, is the worst since 1967. The displacement of tens of thousands of Palestinians has been justified by Israel as a military necessity due to the fierce resistance in that region, primarily Jenin, but other areas as well.

However, many parts of the West Bank, including the area of Masafer Yatta, have not been engaged in armed resistance. Yet, they have been primary targets for Israel’s colonial expansion.

In other words, Israeli colonialism is in no way linked to Palestinian resistance, action or inaction. This has remained true for decades.

Gaza is a stark example. While one of the most horrific genocides in recent history was being carried out, Israeli real estate developers, members of the Knesset (Parliament), and leaders of the illegal settlement movement were all meeting to discuss investment opportunities in a depopulated Gaza. The callous tycoons were busy promising villas on the beach for competitive prices while Palestinians starved to death, amid an ever-growing body count. Even fiction cannot be as cruel as this reality.

It is no wonder that the Americans joined in, as evidenced by equally ruthless comments made by Jared Kushner, the son-in-law of US President Donald Trump, and eventually by the President himself.

While many at the time spoke about the strangeness of US foreign policy, few mentioned that both countries are prime examples of settler colonialism. Unlike other settler colonial societies, both Israel and the US are still committed to the same project.

Trump's desire to take over and rename the Gulf of Mexico, his ambition to occupy Greenland and claim it as American territory, and, of course, his comments about owning Gaza are all examples of settler colonial language and behavior.

The difference between Trump and previous presidents is that others used military power to expand US influence through war and hundreds of military bases worldwide without explicitly using expansionist language. Instead, they referenced the need to challenge the Soviet "red menace," "restore democracy," and launch a global "war on terror" as justifications for their actions. Trump, however, feels no need to mask his actions with false logic and outright lies. Brutal honesty is his brand, though in essence, he is no different than the rest.

Israel, on the other hand, rarely feels the need to explain itself to anyone. It remains a model of a ferocious, traditional colonial society that fears no accountability and has no regard for international law.

While the Israelis pushed to conquer and ethnically cleanse Gaza, they remained entrenched in southern Lebanon, insisting on remaining in five strategic areas, thus violating the ceasefire agreement with Lebanon, which was signed on November 27.

A perfect case in point was the immediate—and I mean immediate—expansion into southern Syria, the moment the Syrian regime collapsed on December 8.

As soon as the events in Syria opened up security margins, Israeli tanks rolled in, warplanes destroyed almost the entirety of the Syrian army, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu canceled the armistice agreement signed in 1974.

That expansion continued, though Syria represented no so-called security threat to Israel whatsoever. Israel is now in control of the Sheikh Mountain and Quneitra inside Syria.

The unquenchable appetite for land in Israel remains as strong as it was upon the formation of the Zionist movement and the takeover of the Palestinian homeland nearly eight decades ago.

This realization is crucial, and Arab countries, in particular, must understand this. Sacrificing Palestinians to the Israeli death machine with the flawed calculation that Israel's ambitions are limited to Gaza and the West Bank is a fatal mistake.

Israel will not hesitate for a minute to militarily move into any Arab geographic space the moment it feels able to do so, and it will always find US support and European silence, regardless of how destructive its actions are.

Jordan, Egypt, and other Arab countries could find themselves facing the same predicament as Syria today: watching their territories being devoured while remaining powerless and without recourse.

This realization should also matter to those busy finding “solutions” to the Palestinian-Israeli “conflict,” which narrowly frame the problem to that of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

Settler colonialism can never be resolved through creative solutions. A settler colonial state ceases to exist, and a settler colonial society ceases to function if territorial expansion is not a permanent state of affairs.

The only solution to this is that Israel’s settler colonialism must be challenged, curtailed, and ultimately defeated. It may be a difficult task, but it is an inescapable one.

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