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by SHELDON RICHMAN
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The Trump-Kushner Delusion on Palestine



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Here's a shocker: Donald Trump and his Palestine-Israel fixers think they can buy a peaceful and permanent settlement of the 70-year conflict by getting Arab governments to pressure the Palestinians into forgetting the "politicians' talking points" — you know, superficial things like independence from the routine abuses and [indignities](#) of colonial oppression (that's right; the same trifles Americans celebrated on July 4) — and focusing instead on what really matters: roads, jobs, and money.

In Trumpworld, everyone and everything — including the longing for justice — has a price.

According to [many indications](#) and chief envoy/Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner's own [interview](#) with the Palestinian newspaper *Al Quds*, the Trump plan is to have Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt gang up on the Palestinians in order to compel them to accept money for economic development in return for dropping their demands for a sovereign and independent state free of Israeli domination, that is, a state consisting of (most of) the West Bank and Gaza Strip with its capital in East Jerusalem. Instead of insisting that Israel withdraw from the lands conquered in and occupied since the 1967 war, dismantle its illegal settlements, and tear down its wall (which runs not along the 1967 border but *through* the West Bank), the Palestinians are expected to accept promises of outside investment in infrastructure and jobs. Their "state" would consist of a few disconnected villages, presumably isolated Gaza, and a capital in a [Jerusalem suburb](#). How bad can one (or in this case four) misjudge a situation?

One might reasonably suspect the plan is being designed precisely to be rejected by the Palestinians in order to brand them, yet again, as anti-peace and to justify continued Israeli atrocities. Further, we have every reason to expect that Israel itself would not accept the plan because even this paper Palestinian state would be unacceptable to nearly every Israeli. As the song says, "This land is mine. God gave this land to me." Not that Israel's government would reject the plan outright; rather, it will equivocate, letting the Palestinians bear the "rejectionist" label alone.

The plan is being formulated by — SARCASM ALERT — three accomplished diplomats with long records of thoughtful, objective consideration of the events that have brought Palestine and Israel to where they are today: Kushner, a debt-ridden real estate developer with a [history of connections to the illegal Israeli settlements](#) in the West Bank; Jason Greenblatt, the Trump Organization's former lawyer who once was a guard at one of those [illegal West Bank settlements](#) and who seems proud to be able to [say](#), "Mr. Trump does not view the settlements as being an obstacle for peace"; and David Friedman, former Trump bankruptcy lawyer and ambassador to Israel, who [supports](#) Israeli annexation of some of the West Bank and who ran an organization that [raised millions of dollars for the illegal settlements](#). We might add that Kushner, 37, has [known](#) Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu since he was a teenager; they appear to have a godfather-godson relationship.

It would be an understatement to say that this trio, like its boss, is entirely in Israel's corner and have no time whatever for the pesky Palestinians. This is nothing new for the US, but Trump has gone to great lengths not to obscure that fact.

The Kushner mission — which seems dedicated in part to enabling Trump to brag that he pulled off the “deal of the century” — got off to a rousing start with the president's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and his moving of the US embassy there from Tel Aviv — on one of the days that Israel was gunning down peaceful protesters in the Gaza open-air prison. The status of Jerusalem has long been regarded as one of those thorny issues to be resolved by the Israelis and Palestinians at the end of the negotiation process, but nevertheless the Israeli position is that Jerusalem is Israel's “eternal and undivided capital.” Trump agrees.

So much for Trump's short-lived talking point during a presidential debate that he had to *appear* fair (not actually *be* fair, mind you) if he was to bring peace to the troubled region.

Before looking at what we know about the emerging Kushner plan, a little context would help. Americans who rely on the establishment news media for information would not know that the Palestine-Israel story has been carefully crafted to make the Israelis look good and the Palestinians bad. In tone and particulars, Israel is portrayed as the unambiguously righteous and wronged party, while the Palestinians are portrayed as everything but righteous and wronged. Virtually every commentary assumes it is the Palestinians who must prove *they* are worthy of peace, security, (and some highly limited measure of) self-governance. The burden of proof is entirely theirs. The Israeli have nothing to prove.

This is surreal, considering that it the pre-Israel Zionists who, in first Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion's [words](#), “have come here and stolen [the Palestinians'] country.” In 1948, what would become the Israeli army massacred hundreds and drove three-quarters of a million Palestinians out of their homeland and internally displaced many more, creating the refugee problem that exists to this day. This was the Nakba, the catastrophe, which Israeli historians call “ethnic cleansing.” Then in 1967 Israel conquered what it didn't take in 1948, creating hundreds of thousands more internal refugees.

So why must the Palestinians prove themselves worthy of civil treatment? Because they resisted dispossession and occupation? Because they are inconsequential Arabs, while the ruling Israelis are mostly white European Jews?

According to the conventional thinking, it is the Palestinians, not the Israelis, who must make concessions. Every apparent concession by Israel is hailed as amazingly generous; every Palestinian objection is condemned as proof of their unworthiness; and every actual concession by them is shoved down the memory hole. In fact, Israeli “concessions” are mere modifications of Israel’s bottom-line demands; it has made no concessions regarding its obligations under international law.

How many people realize that the Palestinians have moved from their initial call for one liberal secular state for Muslims, Christians, and Jews (Yasser Arafat [UN speech](#), 1974); to [acceptance of two states](#) along the pre-1967 borders, with the Palestinians thereby conceding 78 percent of Palestine to Israel; to [acceptance](#) of 60 percent of the illegal Israeli settlements in 2 percent of the West Bank, with an equivalent land swap nearby? When have those advances toward a resolution ever been called generous by America’s political and pundit classes?

What the Palestinians won’t accept — the object of their so-called “rejectionism” — is a “state” that is little more than a few uncontiguous villages separated by a wall, a “state” over which Israel asserts ultimate control in the name of security. But even that is too much for most Israelis. They have no objection to the [Palestinian Authority](#) exerting authoritarian control over the Palestinians — that’s all the Oslo Accords accomplished, relieving Israelis of the bad-PR dirty work — but they will not accept Palestinians in charge of their own security against Israel, which means not only the Israeli military but also the fanatical settlers, many of them Americans, who think nothing of killing, bashing, and humiliating the *goyische* Palestinians with impunity. (See army vets’ testimony about gratuitous violence at [Breaking the Silence](#). Also, see this [video](#).) A pacification program similar to Oslo seems planned for [Gaza](#).

That’s the historical context. The present context bodes equally ill for Trump’s Deal of the Century.

Kushner says PA President Mahmoud Abbas boycotted the American delegation’s recent visit because he fears the plan being formulated will be acceptable to the Palestinians. Abbas boycotted because of the Jerusalem move, and he is indeed out of sync with the Palestinians, so unpopular he would lose an election today. He’s disliked because his security forces imprison, torture, and harass Palestinians who resist the Israeli occupation, which moral intuition and the International Court of Justice [condemn](#) as illegal, and he has added to the hardship of the Gazans. Moreover, Abbas’s presidential term expired in 2009, but he has yet to hold an election.

Even so, the Trump administration deludes itself if it thinks the Palestinians dislike Abbas because he has been *unwilling* to compromise. On the contrary, they think their side has made all the concessions and has received nothing in return. For example, since Oslo 20 years ago, the number of Israeli settlers has more than doubled and Israel has taken more and more Palestinian land. Peaceful protesters in the Occupied Territories are detained indefinitely without charge and tortured when they are not shot. Homes are demolished as a form of collective punishment and deterrence.

So Kushner's alleged good intentions notwithstanding, the Palestinians won't care what his friend Saudi Crown Prince Mohamad bin Salman wants. They will be unimpressed that Arab rulers are willing to sacrifice them for an alliance with America and Israel against Iran. They will therefore refuse to be "delivered."

Israel's position on what the ICJ calls the Occupied Palestinian Territories has been accurately likened to a guy who eats a pizza while claiming he's ready to discuss how to divide it with his dinner companion. And that's okay with Trump and Kushner.

As I write, more pizza is being consumed in Khan al-Ahmar and Abu Nuwar, two Bedouin villages east of Jerusalem. The Jahalin tribe used to live in the Negev desert in what became southern Israel in 1948. In 1952 the Israeli government expelled them so a Jewish town could be built and deposited them in the West Bank, which until 1967 was held by Jordan (having colluded with Israel in 1948 to deprive the Palestinians of their own state). The Jahalin "found a niche in the Judean Desert between Jerusalem and Jericho where they could continue their lives as nomadic herders," writes Jeff Halper, co-founder of Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions. As Israel executed its plan to make the illegally acquired West Bank a permanent part of Israel, it "steadily pushed [the Bedouin] into ever more remote and constricted areas." Halper continues:

In 1976 Israel established Ma'aleh Adumim, today the third largest settlement in the Occupied Territory with more than 40,000 (Jewish) inhabitants, in the center of Jahalin life. Since 1997 the Civil Administration has been forcing the Jahalin off their land entirely, relocating them by force onto a barren hilltop literally on the Jerusalem municipal garbage dump. Trucks full of garbage pass through their crowded shanty town on the way to dumping the garbage below, and the stench is overpowering....

The declared intent of the Civil Administration is to remove all the Bedouin from Area C, part of a process of removal that affects the Palestinian population as a whole. Area C represents 62% of the West Bank, and it is where the Israeli settlements are located. Two and a half million Palestinians of the West Bank – 84% of the population – are locked into

some 70 tiny, isolated and impoverished enclaves called Areas A and B on the other 38%....

Khan al-Ahmar, situated ironically at the biblical site of the Inn of the Good Samaritan, is home to 173 people, 92 of them children. The school, built by Italian volunteers in 2009, the first school the Jahalin ever had, serves 150 kids.

In June the Israeli Supreme Court gave its blessing to the destruction of Khan al-Ahmar. The court said the homes were built illegally, which in a way is true because Israel won't let Palestinians build homes legally — but, then, the Israeli occupation itself is illegal by any civilized moral and legal standard.

Allison Deger [updates](#) the story at Mondoweiss:

Israel forces arrived this morning [July 4] to two Palestinian-Bedouin villages and began razing buildings in preparation for taking over the land, alarming human rights groups who say such a move would effectively cut the West Bank into two.

The villages Khan al-Ahmar, and Abu Nuwar are home to just around 2,000 Bedouins, but the impact of their removal would be lasting, making a Palestinian state no longer possible, advocates of the two-state solution warned.

Much could be said about this horrible event: imagine being kicked out of the home you built and seeing it bulldozed. (for a late development, a temporary stay, see [this](#).) But what occurs to me most forcefully is how much the scene resembles what the Russian czar used to do when he expelled the Jews from their *shtetls*. The big difference is that now it is Jews working through the Jewish State who are doing the evicting.

And all of this is just fine with the virtuous Trump, Kushner, Greenblatt, and Friedman.