

## Trump's Punitive Peace Process - Palestinians Pressured to Accept Israeli Terms

(Palestine Absorbed into Israel "Piece by Piece")

In an arrogant bid to force the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to resume peace talks, the Trump government has revoked visas for the Palestinian envoy to the United States, shut the PLO General Delegation Office in Washington and froze all PLO bank accounts. This is a classic example of the ancient maxim, "the powerful do as they please and fairness applies only between those equal in power."

The Trump administration also cut all U.S. funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA), the body responsible for assisting Palestinian refugees in the Occupied Territories, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. This move will have, "...potentially devastating impacts for 5 million people who rely on its schools, healthcare and social services."

Punishing the weaker party back to the bargaining table is what Donald Trump calls "negotiation", but it's really just bullying. It has been suggested that Trump and Netanyahu are attempting to delegitimize the refugee status of Palestinians to weaken their claim to a collective "right of return", a major negotiating issue in the peace process. Alternatively, Israel offers citizenship to any Jew who requests it, although prominent critics like American Jews Noam Chomsky and Norman Finklestein are barred from entering the "Middle East's only democracy." So much for right of return and democratic freedom of speech.

For those who are unaware, these Palestinian refugees did not voluntarily leave their homes but were driven out by triumphant Israeli forces in 1948 and 1967. Some Palestinians inhabit shrinking West Bank enclaves under harsh martial law, a minority live as Arab Israeli citizens and hundreds of thousands are trapped in the polluted, open air prison called Gaza.

Although Gaza's soil and water is badly polluted by Israeli munitions; it does have the sufficient natural resources to prosper; if Israel and also Egypt were to respect its borders, coast and air space. The Israeli military claims Gaza's offshore natural gas and harasses its fishermen. The tiny strip features beautiful beaches, a potential fishery, offshore natural gas resources and residents eager to work and engage with the world. It is extremely cruel and hypocritical for powerful actors to trap people in a hopeless situation for the sole purpose of intimidating them into surrendering. Israelis might look to their own European history for perspective on people's will to survive.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting Hamas' hostility to Israel. It is certainly true that Hamas' leadership has been very hostile to the Israeli state, even going so far as to question its right to exist. However, this is no different from Benjamin Netanyahu's March 2015 declaration that there would be "no Palestinian state on his watch..." or the 2004 comments of a senior Ariel Sharon advisor to a *Haaretz* reporter, "...when you freeze that (peace) process, you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, and you

prevent a discussion on the refugees, the borders and Jerusalem.” Ironically, Hamas was once an ally of Israel in its attempts to undermine the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

There are good reasons why the Israeli state utterly opposes any unification of Palestinian factions. One is that the Hamas-Fatah conflict has provided a useful pretext for refusing to engage in serious negotiations. How can one negotiate with a divided entity? More significantly, for more than 20 years, Israel has been committed to separating Gaza from the West Bank in violation of the Oslo Accords it signed in 1993, which declare Gaza and the West Bank to be an inseparable territorial unity. Such unification would seriously interfere with Israeli plans to dominate the West Bank and isolate existing Palestinian enclaves as current maps indicate. These plans bode ill for the shrinking prospects of a viable Palestinian state.

Any analysis of Middle East affairs is incomplete without considering the enduring and symbiotic relationship between the United States and Israeli, its dependent client state and useful Middle East proxy. The most egregious error committed by Middle East commentators is ignoring the fact that Israel is essentially an American protectorate, almost wholly dependent on official U.S. military, economic and diplomatic support. It seems obvious that removing or sharply trimming this umbrella would remove much of the impunity with which Israel currently behaves. This levelling could only have positive

Unfortunately, a succession of American administrations have been cowed by Israeli nuclear musings. As well, the current situation under Netanyahu is severely alienating America's Liberal Jews, who were formerly willing to overlook the worst features of the military occupation of the West Bank, Golan and the defacto blockade of Gaza. As well, this weakening support will eventually result in political repercussions like less military support, money and diplomatic cover.

Israel's external enemies pose a lesser threat than that nation's internal troubles: religious fanaticism (of the ancient Hebrew variety), the creeping theocracy trend, elite commitment to incremental territorial expansion (Eretz Israel) and, as I mentioned before; a hazardous reliance on superpower sponsorship. Netanyahu has no humane plan to deal with displaced Palestinians but relies almost exclusively on force. He and previous Israeli prime ministers refuse to heed the advice of the Shin Bet and other security services on the matter of how to ease tensions with Hamas. I really fear that the Israeli people will eventually pay a high price for the intransigence of their political class.

Netanyahu's current agenda includes pretending to acknowledge the “peace process”, which remains a tactic to facilitate the illegal settlement and development of the most valuable Palestinian territory in a “piece by piece” process of gradual absorption, even modest research reveals that the founders of Israel intended to use the 1947 UN partition as an expansion platform. Israel's flexible borders show no signs of becoming fixed. When critiquing Hamas' conduct; we must assume that they are aware of this reality and of those Israeli elements who wish to create a Jewish theocracy along Old Testament lines.

It seems perfectly natural to me that Palestinian Arabs would seek to return to the land from which their ancestors were driven in 1948 and 1967. Unfortunately for them, justice, as viewed through the lens of power; favours the mighty. In this case, the Israeli state, with full U.S. support; acts with impunity and rearranges the official narrative to justify its behaviour while successfully defining the opposition as terrorists. It's a very old and reliable script.

In an ongoing effort to maintain their national myths, Israeli bureaucrats continue to reseal declassified records that threaten to expose the darker aspects of Zionism and Western efforts to help Israel expand territorially. As Orwell said of history, those who control the past control the future. Donald Trump is wrong thinks he can control the present with threats.