

The “Deal of the Century” from a Palestinian Perspective

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On the evening of January 28, 2020, thousands of Palestinians and people around the world following the Palestinian/Israeli conflict sat in front of their TV screens to watch the president of the United States release his “Peace to Prosperity” plan, which had been in the works for the past three years and moved into high gear after U.S. President Donald Trump’s announcement of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel on December 6, 2017, violating all United Nations General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on the conflict.

It didn’t take the Palestinian leadership long to respond publicly and officially by rejecting the proposal. According to the most recent polls conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 94% of the Palestinian public rejects the plan. Many governments, including those of powerful Arab and Western countries, the European Union and the Arab League, issued statements that started by welcoming the efforts of the Trump administration and ended by softly rejecting the plan and reminding the American team of the importance of the international references based on UN resolutions that have enjoyed consensus for decades. That consensus led to the historic compromise of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) when it shifted its strategy from armed resistance aimed at liberating the occupied land of 1948 to one of peace negotiations, recognizing Israel and accepting Palestinian political sovereignty on only 22% of Mandatory Palestine.

Immediately after the release of the plan, I published a five-page summary in English and Arabic because as a Palestinian, I strongly believe

that the people of Palestine should not only reject this so-called peace plan but also understand its contents. Furthermore, since what was offered is not acceptable, one might think it would be ideal for the Palestinians to come up with a detailed counterplan. As enthusiastic as I am about a counter-offer, there doesn't seem to be much point as no one is interested. U.S. Ambassador to Israel David M. Friedman made it clear that the plan is a done deal when, after its release, he said that Israel could unilaterally annex territories once a bilateral U.S.-Israel committee finished its work on demarcating Israel's borders!

Déjà Vu of the Marshall Plan

Trump's proposal is a déjà vu of the Marshall Plan. The "Deal of the Century" calls itself a vision to improve the lives of the Palestinian and Israeli people. It is a 181 pages document divided into two parts: political and economic.

The Political Framework

The first fifty-odd pages of the plan are dedicated to the Political Framework, which covers important political issues that were already identified as the final-status issues by the Oslo framework. They include: Jerusalem, Refugees, Prisoners, Borders, Security, International Relations, Sovereignty and State.

The Trump vision does not cite UN resolutions, saying that they have not and will not solve the conflict and that they have enabled political leaders to avoid addressing the complexities of the conflict rather than enabling a realistic path to peace!

Studying the plan from a Palestinian and United Nations perspective, one can conclude that the political framework is racist and that the answers to all the sensitive final-status issues are designed to serve Israel's best interests: No Jerusalem for the Palestinians, no right of return based on UNGA Resolution 194, no sovereignty or borders on 22% of historic Palestine. Israel will simply continue to occupy Palestinian lives in every aspect. The so-called "Deal of the Century" basically is aimed at entrenchment of the occupation.

The Economic Framework

Then comes the creative Economic Framework, which takes up the remaining 130 pages, with the potential to facilitate more than \$50 billion in new investments over 10 years. It is important to note that this money is not proposed as American aid money but rather as grants and loans, mostly from the Arab regimes.

The Trump administration claims that “Peace to Prosperity” represents the most ambitious and comprehensive international effort for the Palestinians to date. Studying the 181 pages, one might indeed view it as an ambitious vision for prosperity through an economic investment plan for Palestine, the region and the Middle East. The plan focuses heavily on normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab world, relying, of course, on the political framework which is nothing but an American attempt to realize the Zionist vision at the expense of Palestinian society. It is designed by opportunistic Israeli leaders who don’t care about the strategic future of the state of Israel. One must ask: How can this plan guarantee the security of the citizens of Israel if it deprives the Palestinian people of their basic political and civil rights?

Reviewing the economic vision, one witnesses a lot of creative thinking, innovation, technology, pragmatism, modernity and a lot of dreams which were produced professionally to deny Palestinian rights. The Economic Framework will look attractive and seductive to many. Nevertheless, any Deal/Vision for Peace based on international references and UN resolutions on the 1967 borders could have achieved much more economic returns than those presented in the Trump vision. Granting statehood to the people of Palestine on the 1967 borders is an overdue international promise. Needless to reiterate is the international consensus that negotiating the final-status



Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas speaking to Palestinian officials in Ramallah on January 28, 2020. (Credit: Wafa)

issues is the responsibility of the two parties to the conflict and that they alone should decide without unilateral actions. It is worth noting here that while the international community never refrains from advocating for the two-state solution, we don't see those governments recognizing the state of Palestine, nor do we see them identifying the borders of the state of Israel since 1948!

The setting of the release of the “Deal of the Century” was a very provocative scene that neglected the legitimate existence of the Palestinian people's rights, that undermined international law and, above all, that crushed the United Nations and the global political consensus on the question of Palestine.

On the ground, we are witnessing *de facto* implementation of this Israeli/American vision of annexation. Trump's team wished to make it *de jure* by getting Arab and European governments to endorse the deal. Using the motto of the two-state solution, Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu are not waiting for Palestinian approval of this deal. Its announcement gives short notice to the Palestinian people that the situation is shifting into a “one Jewish state” reality, where the Palestinian people will be treated as second-class citizens as already declared by the Knesset in its Nation-State Law. But one thing I am confident about is that the Palestinians will stay here and that no Palestinian will accept being a party to this annexation deal.

A Wake-Up Call for the Palestinians and the International Community

This is a wake-up call for the Palestinian people — and for the sleeping international community, if it continues to issue statements and pass resolutions instead of taking action.

It should come as no surprise that American and Israeli officials will say that the Palestinians are wasting a chance for peace. It is worth highlighting that in drafting the plan, the Trump team used the term “Facilitator” instead of “Mediator,” as they were perfectly aware that the role of the mediator is to try to bring the sides to the conflict to common ground, and they have abandoned that role. This is a blunt confession from the Trump team that this is a business deal rather than a win-win peace deal, as they claim.

After the release of the “Deal of the Century,” one can only imagine the tremendous pressure exerted on the Palestinians to force them to comply. The insinuation that future deals will continue to be less advantageous is an attempt to sugarcoat this annexation plan, which is aimed at exploiting the Palestinians economically and dominating us politically through various

forms of humiliation and segregation. One can't find a better term than apartheid to describe our reality.

What is more important than this deal today is the need to change the Palestinian strategy, which continues to be reactive, seemingly spontaneous rather than considered, and largely nonexistent or dependent on the UN and the international community.

The seeds of opportunity are always cloaked in misfortune. It is our duty to find those seeds. The question is not what the "Deal of the Century" will do for us. Instead, we should ask when, where and who among us should act and what we should do to make our dreams and aspirations a reality. It is about time for the UN to act on its resolutions that safeguard the rights of the Palestinians; it must consider an international consortium to mediate this protracted conflict.

The Palestinians Have the Capability

The last lines of the plan say: "While the vision is ambitious, it is achievable. The future of the Palestinians is one of huge promise and potential."

The Trump team is 100% right in saying that the Palestinian people deserve a better reality. Yes, the people of Palestine long for prosperity, peace and freedom. We are a nation full of visionary people, dreamers and hard workers who are capable of changing this miserable and racist reality that is imposed on us. In fact, we are passionate about bringing peace, prosperity and strategic stability to the region. We teach our kids to respect Hanukkah like we do Easter and Adha. Palestinian kids are not taught that one race or religion is superior to another. With this political framework, Trump is destroying the open-mindedness, tolerance and humanistic upbringing that we have worked so hard to give our kids.

I will conclude that empathy is indeed a universal value that needs to be reconsidered by the president of the most powerful country in the world in order to bring the change that serves both nations, rather than changing realities to serve the interests of one side at the expense of the other.