

PEACE-MAKING IN THE MIDDLE EAST: “NORMALIZATION” WITH...WITHOUT PALESTINE?

ANALYSIS



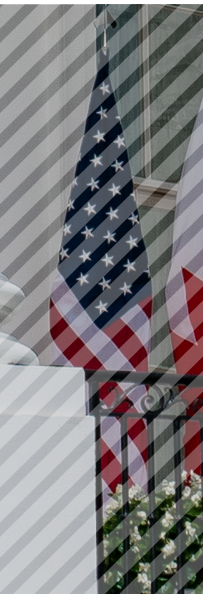
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Abstract: Under the “Trump Deal”, the recent brand of normalization of one-Arab-state-at-a-time with Israel has neglected issues of Palestinian justice and right to statehood. This paper argues that these glaring omissions, solely beneficial to Israel, have inherent negative implications on peace-making. Thus, the “Trump Deal” signifies a manifestation of a visibly uneven foreign policy in the Arab-Israeli conflict. In this analysis, recent Arab “normalizers” with Israel skip moralistic positions having to do with re-cognition of Palestinian dispossession and Palestinians as the key interlocutors in any peace in the Middle East. In this Trump-Kushner-led “reset” of US foreign policy, peace-making targets non-democratic and/or weak states to widen partnership with Israel that tend to do away with the longstanding principle of land-for-peace. Rather, the intent seems to be to exclude the Palestinians and dilute what were the key foundations of conflict resolution between the Israelis and Palestinians, namely UN resolutions.

Keywords: *normalization, Abraham Accords, peace-making, Deal of the Century, Oslo Accords, Bahrain, Israel, UAE*

Recent decades, beginning with the Egypt-Israel peace treaty in 1979 following the Camp David Accords, have witnessed a gradual yet unofficial movement towards ‘normalization’ between Israel and its Arab neighbors. However, for Egypt, followed by Jordan in 1994, the end of an official state of war has often felt like a cold peace. Meanwhile, Palestinian struggles for a nation-state have been eclipsed since the failure of the Oslo Accords. Yasser Arafat and Palestinian Liberation Organization’s gamble for a limited, although eventually full, sovereign state did not pay off. Since the concluding of the Oslo Accords in 1993, the two-state solution has edged farther away with each successive American and Israeli governments in power. Current efforts by the Trump administration to resolve the question of Palestinian have fallen short of a sovereign state for Palestinians. Instead, continued economic and political dependency on Israel and the concluding of peace agreements with the hawks of the Middle East dominate the agenda of Trump’s senior advisor Jared Kushner, also his son-in-law, and his shuttle diplomacy between the region’s capitals. Palestinian aspirations for a state have been ignored. The “Deal of the Century” (the “Trump Deal”) and newly signed normalization agreements with Israel have effectively sidelined Palestine not only in the international community but also at the Arab League. This article attempts to raise questions about how the Palestinians’ right to a just peace torn between *faction-alization* and *fiction-alization*. These dialectics have a bearing on the construction of justice and truth.

Re-Cognition & Normalization

Large swathes of Western public opinion-makers have failed to recognize Palestine with reference to its continued dependency on Israel and the international community.

Liberal discourses set cultural and ideational standards and norms for re-cognition of identity politics, environmentalism, feminism, anti-racism in a global setting. Yet there is still resistance to the re-cognition of another of Palestine. When it comes to liberalism *qua* a moral impulse of emancipation, with special reference to Palestine, genuine ‘normalization’ is yet to happen. There is an increasing worldwide diffusion of liberal norms, liberal correctness, and a liberal charge to dispense rights. This liberal trend, however, does not appear to extend to Palestinians. Instead, there appears to be a liberal political-cum-geo-strategic practice, which tends to reproduce Palestine and Israel as a kind of binary. In this logic, Israel is the owner of a singular conception of sovereignty, one land, and of unilateral self-determination that is reserved for its Jewish citizenry, according to the 2018 Jewish ‘nation-state’ law roundly decried by the EU.¹

A similar socio-political world of language-power properties perpetuates claims to Israeli ownership. Knowledge production is a component of the reproduction of this order, ranging from law to security studies. Where knowledge-making is concerned, it has partly been instigated by intellectual assaults on criticisms of Israel by anti-Orientalist and anti-Zionists. Various forms of resistance are criminalized and relegated to the sphere of terrorism. The political, in other words, has worked in tandem with dominant knowledge-practice. The ideological and the moral are central to political battles. Palestine is thus *de-factionalized*, stripped of its facticity and *fictionalized*. This involves constant battles to weaken resistance to dominant discourses whose knowledge-production is founded on denial of Palestinian recognition.

Forces, voices, and discourses disrupting or resisting the *status quo* are silenced or kept to the margins of national debates. An enterprise, which directly and indirectly contributes to “whitewashing Zionism”. Recent attempts to criminalize criticism of Israel in France have tended to conflate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism.² State inaction on the question of Palestine, one-state or two-state solution, is disguised by state action in shrinking the space of freedom of speech in the public sphere.

Such steps undermine the Palestinian quest for re-cognition. Re-cognition is a multi-dimensional, complex term. It refers to making something cognitively acceptable. This entails planting it in the social, political, intellectual, and moral imaginary. Western philosophy is replete with conceptualizations of recognition. Before self-determination and sovereignty become a legal reality, they must be cognized as just, “normalized”, so to speak. For Rousseau, recognition animates the human search for internal and external validation, which partakes of two types of love/esteem. First, *amour de soi*, having to do with personhood and self-love. Though seemingly egoistic, it can be understood as a self-preservation mechanism. Second, *amour propre*, that is, genuine love / esteem. This type is relational, recognition of the self by society.³ The search for recognition, validate the thirst *to be*, past and present. They are expressed and practiced via civic, cultural, and political paraphernalia: NGOs, media activism, legal, social, and political advocacy.

Yet when it comes to Palestine, recent moves to normalization seem to skip the step of re-cognition. Instead, the *fictionalizing* of Palestine, entrenched over the decades, continues. The Camp David Accords of 1978 and the 1979 follow-up peace treaty between Egypt and Israel more or less dismantled the international legal foundations of creating a Palestinian state (UN Resolutions 181 (1947), 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), for example). The

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Oslo brought the Israelis and the Palestinians to dialogue to overcome their intractable political and territorial differences. These negotiations went some way in establishing “confidence building measures” between the two adversaries.⁴ However, the manifold problems with the Oslo Accords can be simplified into the following points:

- Immense power asymmetries, where the Israelis have the upper hand vis-a-vis (divided) Palestinians.
- Biased mediation, namely by the US which, unlike the Norwegians, pressured only the Palestinians in making concessions. That the US “remained committed to Israel and broadly adhered to the latter’s agenda”⁵ boded ill for even-handed terms from the start. American personalization of the failure of Oslo by solely blaming Yasser Arafat, whose “lies, equivocations and outright betrayals” essentially made him the wrong man for peace,⁶ evades assigning any responsibility to the Israelis confirms US one-sidedness in the peace process. Arafat had his own redlines of Palestinian rights not to sign away.
- Enforcement: because Israel has enjoyed asymmetric military advantage over the Palestinians, its intransigence, as it violated diverse Oslo terms of reference, could not be stopped either by mechanisms built into the accords or by the peace brokers themselves.
- Absence of Palestinian unity and consensus: Oslo was a Fatah-led process, which left out other voices: secularists, leftists, and Islamists. The Accords contained the seeds of conflict. It was not inclusive of other political preferences or potentially viable alternative contestants of power among Palestinians, especially Hamas.

- Tri-partite dependence: Extensive international aid flowed⁷ to the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Arafat as part of the Oslo Accords, basically locking them into a dependence syndrome. First, they were dependent on the goodwill of the Israelis to implement Oslo's various provisions in full force. Second, dependence on international donors, as the PA became essentially "clients" of the donor community. Third, dependence on the neutrality of Palestinian sides that had not been drawn into the peace process. Some of these even sought to derail the peace process, turning to violence instead of talks.
- Consolidated policing: The Oslo process shifted some of the burden of policing Palestinians to Palestinians themselves, security "cooperation",⁸ namely the PA. Partially, this mechanism relieved the Israelis through a kind of coercive surrogacy. This created a coercive apparatus that was commanded by Mohammed Dahlan.⁹ The Oslo peace paradigm thus deepened Palestinian-Palestinian polarity.

Furthermore, since Oslo, those UN resolutions rarely nowadays get a mention in the political and media discourse about Palestine and 'peace-making' in the region today. The Trump Deal appears not to consider Palestinian claims of self-determination and of statehood. This has implication for the construction of a socio-political imaginary, which cognizes Palestinian rights. A recent Oxfam report critically assesses 26 years of Oslo "peace", concluding that the so-called Declaration of Principles is far from a "rights-based, principled and inclusive" approach, key to peace grounded in international law. A lack of inclusiveness in the peace process, e.g. of civil society, women and youth, discord instead of unity between the Palestinians, Hamas-Fatah, and a lack of accountability, no third party enforcement, have contributed to Oslo's failure.¹⁰ These have all resulted in an "explosion" of Israeli settlements, rather than their halt, with settlers "quadrupling" in number from 115,600 in 1993 to 600,000 in 2019. Additionally, Oslo-style "peace" has "crippled" the Palestinian economy, with per capita output nosediving to a paltry increase of 0.1% per year (1994-2014) compared to the 4.4% of pre-"peace" years (1968-87), and Palestinian women's unemployment at 47.4%, the highest in the world, in 2017.¹¹

A new brand/generation/type of peace-making: Normalization minus norms

Normalization schemes with Israel are reductive. They introduce frameworks that seek to naturalize peace-for-peace, as opposite land-for-peace. Recent normalization plans hinge not on any type of conditionality. They could have insisted, for instance, on lifting the siege on Gaza as a term of their agreement with Israel. This may go some say into fitting the "normal" within normalization with Israel. Normalization without norms is rendered highly contested, on the grounds of absence of justice. It harks back to the idea of "me-first" type-politics that turns a blind eye to the moral dimensions of putative peace-making. Hence,

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recent brands of normalization contribute to the fictionalizing of Palestine. It sacrifices the very justice at the heart of peace-making. That is, normalization for the sake of normalization, but not for the sake of *just* peacemaking, as evident in the discourse of Jared Kushner and Donald Trump. The ‘Abraham Accords,’ and the subsequent signing ceremony in Washington, D.C. on 15 September, are celebrated as accomplishments for their own sake. They are not a stepping stone to just peace for the Palestinian side.

Terms that epitomize justice, parity for the Palestinians, and equal rights are noted for their absence from the accords. As though the new “normalizers” have sidelined/erased Palestine from peace negotiations in the aim to self-preservation. To this end, normalization is noted for failure to reconcile peace-making with norms of fairness, justice, statehood, and Arab-Islamic solidarity on the question of Palestine. The political narrative is no longer about the rights of the people awaiting return to their usurped land, safeguarding the keys, as it were. This step reduces any normalizers to passive actors in ill-thought peace plans impervious to colonial structures in place that maintain oppression of the Palestinians. That is, they are implicated in hierarchies of power politics not of their making.

“Comparing the various brands of peace-making”

In the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Peace-making has had variable interpretations and application. Those concluded by two Arab states, the Egypt-Israel peace treaty of 1979 (following the 1978 Camp David Accords) and the 1994 Wadi Araba Treaty, marking a second peace agreement this time involving Jordan and Israel, illustrate the point. The scope and content in both treaties of bilateral recognition, de-militarization, land swaps, water arrangements and trade agreements differed. The first is one of recognition and recuperation of Israeli-occupied vast territory. The second, which also restored some territory to Jordanian sovereignty, is more symbolic, having elements of recognition and non-belligerence. Both seem to be lumped under the totalizing term of “normalization”. The flurry of “normalization” undertakings driven by Trump’s “Deal of the Century”-bandwagon is yet another species of so-called peace-making.

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Whilst the word “peace” may take diverse forms and means, in this context “pax”-Trump-Kushner is noted for the absence of justice for the Palestinians. By-passing the Palestinians renders the sign “pax” devoid of its constitutive meaning of conclusion of hostility, war and/or occupation, leading to internationally recognized borders and political settlement by two sides (colonizer and colonized).

Normalization is not only reductionist, as mentioned above, but also, exclusionary. They are vertically executed by singular rulers. Rulers who would not measure public approval of their normalization plans via popular referenda. This brand of peace-making, fashioned as “normalization” by non-democratic states, which function without the full advantage of feedback from elected parliaments and free public opinion, is nothing short of Faustian realpolitik. The crux of such politics is re-branding singular rulers as peace-makers. It puts them in the good books of the powers-that-be, pandering to US law-makers especially when seeking sophisticated American weaponry thus far the exclusive bastion of Israel (UAE’s aspiration to purchase American F-35s is a case in point)¹².

As such, these normalization agreements have nothing to do with Palestine. Certainly, they are not concluded with states who share borders with Israel, much less parties that fought wars with the Jewish state. The motivations of concluding agreements with Israel by Egypt and Jordan, on the one hand, and between Israel and newly normalizing states (e.g. Bahrain and UAE) are two very different kettles of fish. Egypt and Jordan had occupied territory and a history of wars with Israel. The peace that Egypt and Jordan did was top-down, state-to-state. To an extent, it did not filter down to the cognitive and the cultural. What is unfolding now (flag-waving by children, penetration of school textbooks¹³, instructions to hotels to prepare kosher meals¹⁴, etc.) is without precedent. It goes to the heart of re-cognition of Israel. Egypt and Jordan’s peace treaties remain relatively “cold”, not seeping down to their publics at large—although of late, Egypt’s Sissi seems to be redesigning curricula, targeting history subjects with accent put on promoting “peace” with Israel.¹⁵ These steps are still rudimentary, mostly because as in Jordan, Egyptian teacher syndicates still resist such changes.

On the other hand, the UAE has already embarked on curricular initiatives designed to coach Emirati peoples into reconciling with Israel. Despite the heavy price they have paid, Egypt's and Jordan's publics are yet to buy normalization. Images of children waving the Israeli flag are a rarity across the Arab geography. Never seen in Egypt or Jordan. Definitely, both countries' strong teacher unions would at least partially resist such moves.

For, by and large, in the Arab imaginary – and this cannot be changed by the Trump Deal – any remaining moral flame having to do with Palestine reads peace with widespread uniformity: land for peace, not merely peace for peace. That is, peace that reverses the type of quasi-*terra nullius* myth (land without a people) on which peace-making seems to be conducted nowadays, pairing Israel with all in top-down vogue-like “normalization” agreements, except with the sole aggrieved party that matters for genuine peace: the Palestinians. The elephant in the room.

Profiles of the Normalizers

This section “profiles” the parties to the new normalization agreements. Israel is the colonizer in this equation. For over seventy years since its founding, it has committed gross human rights violations. It has evaded a just peace. Israel has not kept its side of the bargain since the Oslo Accords of 1993. According to the Palestinian Prisoners' Club, nearly 180 children and dozens of women (including 16 mothers) are among the nearly 4700 prisoners currently languishing in Israeli prisons where COVID-19 has spread. Long-serving prisoners include 547 sentenced for life and 400 in the notorious administrative detention. Most are deprived of contact with their families, and hundreds are ill. One prisoner, Na'il Barghouthi, has served a total of 40 years in Israeli jails.¹⁶

There is an abundance of documentation testifying to Israel's human rights violations. Amnesty International has spoken of “unlawful killings” of Palestinians and the “collective punishment” of the “illegal” 12-year blockade of Gaza¹⁷, the “boxing in [of]

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Palestinian communities” through building and expanding illegal settlements,¹⁸ and condemnations of the “disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by the Israeli occupying forces against Palestinians.” This includes protestors, as noted by the UN Human Rights Council (a resolution for which the UAE voted *in favor* in 2018!).¹⁹

The UAE’s track-record is also well-known. It has become notorious for its Blackwater mercenaries²⁰ and increasing interventionism throughout the region. One can cautiously wager that this new relationship between the UAE and Israel is one to be watched closely. What does this new UAE-Israel consortium spell for future stability? Joint “adventures” by the two may be on the horizon, certain to create more subterfuge. Israel sees in the UAE a state that breaks Arab ranks. On the other side, the UAE sees in Israel technological and military know-how. That seems to be the new equation, the oddity of which is that it may not bode well for peace.

Bahrain is a tiny country whose Sunni minority rules over a Shi’ite majority. The forceful repression, and GCC intervention led by Saudi Arabia’s Peninsula Shield, of the Bahraini *hirak* in 2011 is only a few years old. There is a Saudi patron-client dynamic at play here. The KSA deftly avoided normalization but put forth Bahrain.

The Abraham Accords: What’s on the Table

The new agreement between Israel and the UAE has been named for one type of “recognition,” of the Prophet Abraham, to “inspir[e]...[and] foster in the Middle East a reality in which Muslims, Jews, Christians and peoples of all faiths....live in....a spirit of coexistence.”²¹ However, ‘recogniz[e]’ a common past ancestor acts (the prophet Abraham) as the fiction needed engineer a technocratic ‘peace’ for the sake of development and elide a divided present conflict from view: “sustainable agricultural development” and “sustainable water use.” Emphasizing this common descent deflects from the root of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is about occupation and rights. The Abraham Accords establish cooperation between Israel and the UAE in the areas of “Visas and Consular Services, Innovation, Trade and Economic Relations, Healthcare, Science, Technology and Peaceful Uses of Outer-Space, Tourism, Culture and Sport, Energy, Environment, Education, Maritime Arrangements, Telecommunications and Post-Agriculture and Food Security, Water, Legal Cooperation.”

The scenario unfurling is one in which two states, which lack the properties of normalization of their own people (i.e. non-democratic states), are engaging in normalization with Israel, at the expense of the Palestinians. However, Peace is not for any Arab state to give. Arab states are free to make peace with Israel. Not, however, on behalf of the Palestinians

What is striking is what the accords do *not* say. The “Israeli-Palestinian conflict,” presumably the backdrop of normalization, is mentioned only twice, in relation to Trump’s “Vision for Peace” (Deal of the Century) and the treaties between Israel and Egypt and Jordan, respectively. The Abraham Accords are not in fact a peace treaty. They are rather an agreement establishing multi-faceted, open-ended cooperation between Israel and the UAE in domains as far-reaching as research and development to counter-terrorism and counter-extremism. It even sets the scene for coordination between Israel, the UAE, and the US on a “Strategic Agenda for the Middle East”, with an eye toward “regional security and stability”, economic development, and “a culture of peace across the region”. For Israel and the UAE, the new normalization is rooted in the “principles of international law” with “respect [for] each others’ sovereignty and the right to live in peace and security.” Absent, however, is mention of the Palestinians’ rights, or discussion of pathways to Palestinian sovereignty. The Accords are silent on Israeli annexation of the West Bank, which the UAE claimed to be fending off by entering into this agreement. Like cooperation, respect for international law here is exclusive, to Israel, the UAE (and Bahrain). It leaves out the Palestinians. The main positive spot in the Abraham Accords may be that the UAE has made public to its people what used to be secret dealings with Israel. Claiming to speak on behalf of the citizenries of the respective parties, the Accords claim that “normalization of Israeli and Emirati relations is in the interest of both peoples.” Yet, an Emirati poet objecting to the new normalization has been banned from travel from her country to Egypt.²²

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American “Footprints”

The new normalization is one stop on Trump’s Deal of the Century journey. There is reason for skepticism about this latest US-mediated “peace” process. The celebrated American fight for independence from the British, the Declaration of Independence, and the attendant values of liberty, justice, equality have come to belong to the civilizational repertoire of humanity. The American Revolution entered into the cognitive imaginary of the world, a grand template for self-determination and freedom. But in foreign policy towards the Middle East, the Americans don’t seem to exercise any *savoir-faire* or know-how related to freedom. In a way, they bear a greater responsibility than other global actors. The Founding Fathers of the American Revolution and the Framers of the Constitution planted a seed in the grand narrative of freedom and independence. What does all this mean when the US is rooting for only one side, one party, one occupying state in this story? The absence of even-handedness leaves the narrative of the Deal of the Century no more than a load of nonsense.

American foreign policy under Trump essentially works against the recognition of the Palestinians and respect for their human rights as directed by international law. Trump diplomacy seems positioned *against* the popular impulses of the 2011 Arab uprisings. Netanyahu has coordinated his annexation plans²³ with the Trump administration’s acceptance of Israeli settlements that previously deemed in violation of international law.²⁴ This is in contradistinction to the European Union’s position maintaining their illegality.²⁵ The US’s history in the Middle East, particularly since George W. Bush, has been one of rampant militarization. For decades, the US failed to promote substantive freedom, justice, or even sustained stability in the Middle East—let alone facilitate genuine peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. The US is not an even-handed mediator and has never been an “honest broker.” Great powers’ play and blunders caused the current tragedy of Palestine: Britain favoured Israel’s creation as a matter of security. The US initially opposed British and French imperialism, especially under Wilson.²⁶ After him, the US, too, sided with Israel, an act of faith integral till present to its security strategy in the Middle East. Washington’s uneven foreign policy says it all.²⁷

This latest normalization scheme is more of the same. An image of an “exceptional” US synonymous with freedom and liberty, and its grand (e.g. Wilsonian) values, seems to have no bearing whatsoever on its foreign policy in the region. Eisenhower’s success in halting the Tri-Partite attack on Suez in 1956 seems a world away. Since then, US policy failed to enhance peace, liberty, or *human* security in the Middle East. (That is if one accepts that the peace treaties between Egypt and Israel, and Jordan and Israel, if Carter’s and Clinton’s achievements in 1979 in 1993, were attempts at peacemaking.)

Despite debates on US “withdrawal”, the Americans have left their militarized mark on a Middle East mired for decades in violence. From the administration of George W. Bush through that of Barack Obama and then Donald Trump, the US destroyed Iraq, colluded with Arab autocrats in sabotaging the Arab Spring, and expanded its counterterrorism and security agenda perpetually hunting down real and phantom terrorists across the Arab world. Additionally, the US mediates ‘peace’ for occupying Israel. What does Israel offer the Americans in return? Some suggest that for the US, Israel is not just a “bulwark against Islamic radicalism”, but also a reliable partner in the Middle East with whom cooperation spans intelligence, missile defense, counterterrorism, drones and robotics, technological innovation, and cyberwarfare (xiv-xvi).²⁸

Normalization in Regional Context

In some ways, the UAE exemplifies the contradictions of the Arab (state) persona. Its wide use of Israeli information technology may itself have facilitated the United States’ benefit from Israeli technology. However, this same military/intelligence technology to which Arab political and military elites succumb helps entrench Israeli colonialism of Palestine.

On the other hand, a caveat is in order. It is important to remember that Palestinians themselves, at least those who follow Fatah and Arafat, have already signed their own (Oslo) peace accord with Israel. So, critique of those who follow suit must not overlook this. However, critique of the latest “normalization” is grounded in indifference to Israel’s failure to keep its side of the bargain. Neither the substance of those accords (i.e. Oslo I and II) nor the schedule designed by its authors has yielded a mutual and reciprocal peace settlement, much less Palestinian statehood.

Some other Muslim countries (e.g. Turkey) have maintained relations with Israel. Qatar is an example of an Arab state that inaugurated relations with Israel in 1996 through a trade office,²⁹ only to break them four years later. Such relations did not mean silence on Israeli aggression or Palestinian rights to statehood. Following the devastating 2009 Israeli war against Gaza, the country closed down Israel’s trade office in Doha permanently. Contacts

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between the two are limited to sports events and modalities of getting aid to Gaza and maintaining a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel. This seems acceptable to Hamas, which maintains some presence in Doha. In response to the new normalization scheme, Qatar, a major donor of humanitarian aid to Palestinians, has reiterated that an end to Israeli occupation, Palestinian statehood, and the refugee right of return, and respect for international agreements are the basis for any “sustainable solution”.³⁰ Kuwait has announced a similar position confirming its support for Palestinian statehood, East Jerusalem as its capital, and the refugee right of return, with its Ministerial Council calling Palestine the “number one Arab and Muslim issue.”³¹

Hence, the question is this: should the states signing new normalization agreements continue to engage in futile exercises, named “peacemaking”? Going into normalization with blind faith in an adversary adept at evading its own commitment to peace, including attendant principles of Palestinian statehood, batters Arab collective action (or whatever is left of it). Moreover, in the case of UAE and Bahrain, it undermines their very ally, KSA. It hammers the last nail in the coffin of the Beirut peace initiative of 1992 and the consensus Saudis garnered for it.

Further, the new brands of normalization must be read within a context of emerging power relations that boldly remaps peace as a one-way road normalization-- juxtaposing it to political aberration (and vice versa). In so doing, normalization legitimates a single standard of peace “one Arab country, one agreement” at a time. Thus, the “Deal of the Century” corners weak Arab states, divides them, and ultimately puts them before a normal/abnormal binary that will be constructed and reconstructed. That is, factionalized and reproduced via signs, and subjects, for and against “peace”, words and worlds, so to speak. Thus, the whole idea of a Palestinian state is perpetually fictionalized within this binarism of normalizers and their others. Nothing shall leave peace more in disarray. For, normalcy is bestowed upon the colonizer; the colonized relegated to the realm of abnormality (spelled enemy of peace).

Thus, the “Deal of the Century” corners weak Arab states, divides them, and ultimately puts them before a normal/abnormal binary that will be constructed and reconstructed

Conclusion

The problems with the “peace” unfolding now go back to the Oslo Accords that extinguished the legal-juridical basis of peace with the Palestinians. By agreeing to Oslo, Arabs shot themselves in the foot and alleviated the Israelis. Instead of international law, it is personalist whims (of Israeli and American elites) that dictate terms of “peace-making”. For now, Israelis have outsmarted their Arab interlocutors and normalizers. There is no give and take in this peace-*taking*. Israel just takes and offers nothing. On top of not having a frame of reference grounded in international law, this peace sorely lacks justice. This is a market-oriented “peace for peace”. Trump boasts that normalization thus will make the region prosperous, evoking images of silk roads, bazars, and affluence. That will not happen. Neither the region nor the world will see peace until justice is addressed.

“There can be no justice without peace, and no peace without justice,” in the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., advocating for another peace movement objecting to the US war in Vietnam. Peace is a normative undertaking. A just peace, or *jus post bellum*. Peace must be rooted in the preservation and guarantee of human rights; it must guarantee order; restore economies; ensure “sovereignty and self-determination”; and put in place transitional justice mechanisms for human rights transgressions and genuine reconciliation.³² None of these principles feature in this latest round of Israeli-UAE “peace-making”. In the case of Palestine, peace has been diluted not only through the erosion of its legal framework, but also through snuffing out its normative underpinnings. The point of reference is no longer laws, but individuals with singularity, power, wealth, and lobbying influence. A more genuine appreciation of peace demands a more holistic view of normalization processes.

For, the complex realities of arriving at peace cannot be watered down by superficial normalization agreements that have nothing to do with Palestinian grievances as a colonized people. Those grievances relate to the right of return, the final status of Jerusalem, water rights, disputed holy places, detainees, siege of Gaza, and war damages and reparation. They will not simply be erased by a series of bilateral peace agreements with Arab non-Palestinian state or non-state actors. To be truly meaningful involves speaking truth to power where peace-making and meaning-making matter. Instead,

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normalization devoid of multidimensional justice for the Palestinians amounts to post-truth and post-justice brands of instrumental politics aimed at short-term gain, indifferent to morally audacious policies.

The above problem doubles up as political and intellectual. Normalization deals, which promise stabilizing the region for prosperity (i.e. the market), commit the short-sighted folly that money-making, rather than delivering justice, deters violence. Fictional-izing peace in such simplistic terms is common currency in some debates concerning the Middle East.³³ This is a question not to be left to Machiavellians for whom problem solving of all things political is reduced to pragmatic business transactions. This is a question that goes to the heart of knowledge production. It cannot be subdued by economic or political apologia for colonization. Intellectual engagement is itself divided, both suited and unsuited to Palestinian claims of justice and re-cognition. Knowledge-making interventions range from historical revisionism to more poignant / trenchant critique of occupation.

Looking Ahead

Critical voices, including those of revisionist Israeli historians, have documented Israel's violence against the Palestinians,³⁴ laying bare the tragedy of uprooting Palestinians to found Israel.³⁵ They critique the US role in the Arab-Israeli conflict and hegemony in the region.³⁶ Israeli women activists, the Women in Black, protest weekly against the occupation.³⁷

Yet, it appears that the international system led by its great powers effectively lives *with* an Israel that is almost borderless, as shifting maps demonstrate.³⁸ This translates into acceptance of Israeli settler-colonialism, the siege of Gaza, and non-recognition of Palestinian rights. But even if the world goes down this route of (implicitly or explicitly) consenting to Israeli occupation and colonization, it will not be able to live without the re-cognition of Palestinian rights. The Palestinians will neither disappear nor stop demanding for justice and statehood. Huge swathes of Arabs will not acquiesce either. It is doubtful that the "peace-making" *a la* normalization will go deep or far. The notion of peace-for-peace, the basis for this so-called Deal of the Century, is not a recipe for peace in the Middle East. It essentially releases the world, especially great powers such as the US, from their moral obligation and courage to recognize the Palestinians' rights to just peace.

The region's peoples need it. Not, however, via agreements for ends other than peace. For "normalization" to find favor with Arab publics, it must obey these principles: justice for the Palestinian, the medium of peace for all

How does that qualify as peacemaking and engagement with the region? How is it an enhancement of peace, stability, or credible arbitration? If the impulse for freedom is vigorous in the modern world, why is it not applied evenly? Why are the energetic discourses invoking freedom and justice not looked upon with a universalist-type consciousness? These very contradictions stand as obstacles to just and sustainable peace. Justness is not about *who*, but *what*—it is in itself an important value. Occupation is reprehensible across the board. So are oppression, colonization, racism. By failing these moral causes, normalization-type peacemaking runs the risk of fictionalizing these great values. Normalization partially factionalizes what ought to be cognized as congenial or deserving of freedom and justice, deserving of re-cognition.

With respect to Palestine, the case for peacemaking is yet to be made with moral vigor and seriousness. Peace and peace-making are by definition normative. Deal-making may be a part of politics. However, issues of peace and justice and recognition cannot be emptied of their moral content, reduced to mere transactions. Purged of its moral content, such top-down peacemaking cannot engender credible or sustainable peace. Anti-normalization protests in Bahrain³⁹ and the West Bank and Gaza hint at this.

Recent normalization schemes may put a smile on Machiavelli's face, and on those of his best mentees such as Morgenthau. They eschew a so-called "intoxication with moral abstractions," instead favoring "self-preservation...for societies is...[as] a moral duty," the *only* moral duty for states and policymakers.⁴⁰ Such positions smack with intrigue and self-interest. For peace-making to be an inherently moral undertaking it must discharge an equally pressing moral imperative: re-cognizing Palestinian rights to self-determination and statehood.

In principle, peace is always welcome when it is done right. The region's peoples need it. Not, however, via agreements for ends other than peace. For "normalization" to find favor with Arab publics, it must obey these principles: justice for the Palestinian, the medium of peace for all. What many Arab publics interrogate is internationally mediated peace that is uneven and leans heavily on the Palestinians to make the bulk of territorial and political concessions. Normalization agreements may be geared towards precipitating a kind of domino-effect peace-making deals of one Arab state at a time *with* Israel. However, no peace in the Middle East will be possible *without* Palestine.

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