

From the Editor



THESE ARE EXTRAORDINARY TIMES where Palestine is concerned. In December 2017, a U.S. president arrogated to himself the prerogative of making far-reaching decisions that strike directly at Palestinian rights and at the Palestinians' claims on the most crucial and sensitive of final-status issues: Jerusalem. Far from reacting strongly to this unprecedented action, Arab governments did little more than register their formal disapproval. There are credible reports that some of them surreptitiously condoned the move. In Israel, meanwhile, the ruling coalition of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has continued to up the ante. He and other senior government leaders have declared openly that Israel will retain permanent control of most of the occupied territories and never allow a fully sovereign Palestinian state to come into being there, while the Likud Party Central Committee at the end of December 2017 unanimously called for annexation of large parts of these territories.

Like almost all of the Trump administration's foreign-policy decisions, the declaration on Jerusalem was aimed mainly at placating the U.S. president's domestic base. It was also meant to satisfy his largest pro-Israel donors, such as Paul Singer and Sheldon Adelson, who gave tens of millions of dollars to the Trump campaign. His statement marked a radical departure from over seventy years of U.S. policy, whereby the status of the holy city remained undetermined pending a final resolution of the Palestine question. The unprecedented step was linked to the outlines of a Trump proposal—which at the time of writing had yet to be formally presented—for an Israel-Palestine “deal.” According to multiple news reports, the deal would involve some kind of noncontiguous, nonsovereign “state” based in the Gaza Strip, which would not include Jerusalem or the removal of any settlements, with some areas of the West Bank possibly to be included, but only subject to further negotiations.

This purported plan and the Jerusalem declaration share several features. One is the abandonment of even the shabbily transparent U.S. pretense of impartiality. Another is the explicit or implicit U.S. acceptance of core Israeli positions. By recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, Trump has not only accepted the basic Israeli stand on this vital issue. He has done so without any quid pro quo from Israel, and without any recognition of similar Palestinian claims on Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. The latter point is crucial: it means that the United States, the ostensible mediator between the two sides for half a century, has accepted a key demand of one side, while refusing to consider that of the other.

Equally important, by implication Trump has also endorsed Israel's expansive definition of “unified Jerusalem” as its capital, including the extensive Arab areas in and around the eastern part of the city that were annexed after the 1967 war. By his action, Trump not only overturned decades of U.S. policy. He also ignored over a dozen United Nations Security Council resolutions that the United States voted for, as well as the entire body of international law regarding the illegality of Israel's actions, including the annexation of East Jerusalem and the colonization of occupied territory in both the city and its environs—thereby implicitly endorsing Israel's identical

actions elsewhere in the occupied territories. This is potentially the most revolutionary U.S. policy shift on the Palestine issue since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 242 in 1967.

The details reported about the Trump “peace plan” feature similarly radical elements. Illegal settlements and annexations are to be recognized and legalized. Jerusalem is to belong exclusively to Israel. Palestinian rights, international law, UN Security Council decisions, and world opinion are to be completely ignored. And Palestinian interests and concerns are to be entirely subordinated to those of Israel. For close observers of past U.S. practice where Palestine and Israel are concerned, none of this is entirely new. However, the U.S. bias has never been so nakedly blatant. With this plan, the United States has ceased to be Israel’s lawyer, in Aaron David Miller’s immortal phrase. By taking Israel’s core positions as its own, it has become its partner and enabler, proposing to negotiate directly (or indirectly via pliable Arab client states) with the Palestinians on Israel’s behalf using these positions as the starting point.

In some respects, all of these moves are clarifying. Dropping what was always a false pretense, the United States can no longer pose as the “honest broker” mediating between the parties. Adopting core Israeli stances means that it must henceforth be considered an adversarial party in any future Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, sitting together with Israel on the opposite side of the table from the Palestinians.

The Arab governments that have reacted passively to Trump’s Jerusalem declaration and to his faux peace plan continue to separate themselves from the opinion of majorities of their own peoples and can no longer credibly claim to be partisans of the Palestine cause. As some of these regimes (none of which is democratic or represents the will of their people on this issue, or most others) overtly align themselves with Israel, they represent the Zionist project’s latest external props in its colonial war against the Palestinian people.

The current Israeli government has also revealed its true intentions, abandoning previous dissimulations. These include the pretense that it favors a peaceful solution to the conflict, or supports the faithful execution of earlier agreements, or accepts a two-state solution. For decades, Netanyahu and his predecessors have done everything possible to sabotage such outcomes, but this Israeli government is no longer pretending otherwise. The pretense has also been dropped that Israel is a state where democratic freedoms for all and the principle of equality prevail: instead, Israel is revealed in its true light as an ethnocracy with certain key rights available to its Jewish citizens alone. (And even some of the latter are beginning to find their rights limited if they hold views contrary to those of the now-dominant ultranationalists.)

The simultaneous dropping of so many masks will take time to process fully. However, this clarity coming all at once provides an opportunity to rethink what is going on in Palestine and how to respond to it. The only option acceptable to the prevailing forces in Israeli politics, with the full endorsement of the current U.S. administration, is clearly a single state from the sea to the river that rules over millions of Palestinians but offers full national, political, and other rights to its Jewish citizens alone.

As the occupation and annexation necessary to realizing this vision become permanent features of the landscape in Palestine, the colonial nature of the conflict and the indefensibility of the actions of the Israeli state also become clearer. It is increasingly hard to be a proponent in good conscience of this future vision of profound permanent inequality for Palestinians, and of endless insecurity for

Israelis. Not surprisingly, in the United States, these new realities are beginning to be reflected in the mainstream media, in politics, in public opinion, and in activism around Palestine, notably where the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement is concerned. It is also not surprising that the pushback against the resulting deterioration in the cherished image of Israeli innocence and purity has become much fiercer and more widespread.

Palestine is facing another very difficult period in its history. Great damage will undoubtedly be done as Trump, Netanyahu, and their covert allies among Arab governments rush to establish new and awful realities on the ground in keeping with this dystopian vision. The ability of the Palestinians to resist will again be sorely tested in the absence of decisive and unified leadership, at a time when the broader Arab world is riven by division, weakened by the absence of democracy, and undermined by the increasingly favorable disposition to Israel of many of its absolute rulers.

But, at the same time, there are multiple pitfalls for both the United States and Israel as a result of the policy course that Donald Trump and his Israeli allies have charted with their recent actions. The dropping of so many masks has provoked important changes inside the United States where the bipartisan nature of U.S. support for Israel is slowly evaporating, deep divisions over Israel are emerging within the Jewish community, and young people are more and more disenchanted with the long-standing consensus of idiocy among the U.S. political establishment in support of anything and everything Israeli governments do. Such developments do not bode well for a country that still relies overwhelmingly on external support, in particular that of Washington, for the advancement of its project to achieve a complete subjugation of the Palestinians and transform Palestine into an exclusively Jewish state.

This issue of the *Journal of Palestine Studies* includes two articles reflecting key aspects of life for Palestinians under Israeli colonial rule in the occupied territories. One, by Rita Giacaman, deals with the framework of public health while the other, by Selma Abdel-Qader and Tanya Lee Roberts-Davis, examines the little-known crisis resulting from the transfer into the West Bank of hazardous and other wastes from Israel and Israeli industries in illegal settlements.

Giacaman shows that by analyzing health outcomes for Palestinians in terms of the traumatic conditions of life inherent to militarized rule under Israeli settler colonialism, public health interventions cannot be divorced from the political realm, a sphere that is commonly excluded from the standard biomedical approach. The development of an alternative approach by the Institute of Community and Public Health at Birzeit University sheds light on the very tangible effects of oppression. The article also explains how such research can contribute to the resilience of Palestinian communities that have operated for generations under the extraordinary stress of chronic warlike conditions.

Abdel-Qader and Roberts-Davis note that there is a large body of evidence pointing to the disposal of hazardous waste in the occupied Palestinian territories, with all the ramifications involved for the Palestinian population there. They assess the possibility of utilizing the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, to which Israel is a signatory, to halt the transfer into the West Bank of such wastes from inside Israel and from industries based in illegal Israeli settlements. This innovative approach has not yet been tried, and the authors suggest ways in which it could be employed to mitigate this serious threat to Palestinian public health.

This issue includes an article by Andrea L. Stanton that employs archival and newspaper sources on Palestinian tourism to Lebanon to examine the formation of new national identities during the Mandatory period. The article's original approach shows how rapidly such identities were reframed in the wake of the post-World War I partitions of the Levant. Also in this issue is a report on the Palestinian Oral History Archive (POHA) based at the American University of Beirut by two of the project's founders, Hana Sleiman and Kaoukab Chebaro. POHA was launched in 2011 in order to collect and digitize the recollections of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The highly sophisticated digitization of a collection of over one thousand personal testimonies constitutes an invaluable resource for researchers, which not only represents a major effort to collect these irreplaceable personal records before it is too late but just as importantly gives voice to those who are often written out of history despite being some of its worst affected victims.

Lastly, Laurie King offers a touching remembrance of the talented Lebanese filmmaker Jean Chamoun, who chronicled the personal stories of ordinary people during the wars that rent Lebanon from the mid-1970s until the early 1990s. Often working together with his wife, the Palestinian filmmaker Mai Masri, Chamoun was a beloved artist and a much-needed humanistic voice throughout the years.

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