

Secret Palestine documents expose sham “peace process”

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The release of some 1,700 secret documents has exposed the so-called peace process as a criminal farce, part of a permanent US-Israeli conspiracy against the basic rights of the Palestinian people.

The papers, which consist of minutes of negotiating sessions, diplomatic correspondence, memos, maps and other materials dating from 1999 to 2010, were obtained by the Al Jazeera television network. They present a devastating portrait of all sides engaged in the last decade of US-brokered Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) of Mahmoud Abbas is exposed as wholly subservient to US and Israeli interests. It is desperate to salvage an agreement that will secure it the fiction of a Palestinian state at the expense of every historic aspiration of the Palestinian people, which it represses and lies to in a bid to cement the privileges of a small wealthy layer.

To this end, as the documents make clear, the PA's negotiators were prepared to accept the devouring of East Jerusalem by Zionist settlements, repudiate the right of exiled Palestinians to return to their land, and participate in mass transfers of Arab populations, a form of ethnic cleansing designed to meet Israel's goal of a demographically secure “Jewish state.” All of this was done behind the backs of the Palestinian people.

For their part, the Israelis emerge as ruthless and brutal in their determination to suppress the Palestinians and expropriate every possible inch of their land. Absolutely uninterested in reaching any agreement, they utilize the negotiations to extract ever greater concessions from their pliant Palestinian counterparts, while establishing new “facts on the ground” in terms of ever-mushrooming Zionist settlements in the occupied territories.

As for Washington, under Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama alike, US diplomacy assumes a criminal character in relation to the Palestinian question, just as it does throughout the Middle East. Negotiators routinely side with Israel on all substantive issues, while treating the Palestinians with unconcealed contempt. Any attempt by the latter to raise basic issues of international law or even previous commitments made and unceremoniously broken are dismissed as “unrealistic” and foolish.

The arrogance and hostility with which imperialism treats not only the Palestinians but every oppressed people and the working class all over the world was summed up in a remark by then-US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and recorded in one of the transcripts. Dismissing claims on behalf of the millions of Palestinians condemned to exile, statelessness and bare subsistence in squalid refugee camps, Rice commented, “Bad things happen to people all around the world all the time. You need to look forward.”

The continuity of this vicious attitude toward the plight of the Palestinians was made clear by Rice's successor, Hillary Clinton, who is recorded in a transcript from the fall of 2009 as demanding to know why Palestinians acted as if they were “always in a chapter of a Greek

tragedy.”

None of this will come as a revelation to millions of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and the millions more scattered in exile in Lebanon, Jordan and elsewhere. Their daily life of Israeli military strikes, roadblocks, land expropriations and countless humiliations is testament to the fraud and failure of the so-called “peace process.”

Nonetheless, just as the US diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks on the corruption and torture practiced by the regime of President Zine El Abadine Ben Ali fueled the mass revolutionary uprising that has overthrown it, the documents published by Al Jazeera pose a mortal threat to the survival of the corrupt and authoritarian regime headed by Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah.

The Palestinian Authority reacted with rage to the publication of the documents, calling them “a bunch of lies” and “fabricated.” Meeting in Cairo with President Hosni Mubarak, PA President Abbas charged that the documents published by Al Jazeera were “intended” as a “mixup,” attributing Israeli negotiating positions to the PA's own negotiators.

Yasser Abed Rabbo, the secretary-general of the Palestine Liberation Organization, charged that Al Jazeera was trying to “trick and mislead the simple citizen” and suggested that it was acting on behalf of the Islamist movement Hamas, the PLO's rival, which governs the Gaza Strip.

The leading Fatah faction of the PLO organized a demonstration outside Al Jazeera's offices in Ramallah, which were hit by vandalism. Some officials have suggested the station will be closed down in the West Bank.

For its part, Hamas said that the documents expose “the level of the Fatah authority's involvement in attempts to liquidate the Palestinian cause, particularly on the issue of Jerusalem and refugees, and its involvement against the resistance in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.”

The claims that the documents are forged or that Israeli positions are misrepresented as those of the Palestinian negotiators are not credible. The most incriminating material is contained in the transcripts of negotiating sessions in which the source of these positions is unmistakable. In addition to Al Jazeera, the British *Guardian* newspaper, with which the network shared the material, has vouched for their validity.

Among the most significant of the revelations in the papers released by Al Jazeera are the concessions offered by the PA's negotiators on core issues, which stood in stark contrast to official positions upheld by the Palestinian movement for decades.

These included:

- An offer to allow Israel to retain control of all but one of its settlements in East Jerusalem, effectively ceding control of nearly all of what was to have been the Palestinian capital to the Israelis. Under international law, all of these settlements are illegal. The Palestinian negotiator, Ahmed Qureia, is quoted in a transcript from a May 2008 negotiating session as describing the concession as “unprecedented” and something that “we refused to do” at Camp David.

- An offer to settle for a “symbolic number” of refugees expelled in 1948 to be allowed to return to Israel, reportedly 100,000 over 10 years.

Such a proposal would effectively renounce the rights of more than five million stateless Palestinians.

- An offer to place control of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site in Jerusalem's old city, which includes the Dome of the Rock and al Aqsa mosques, under control of a joint committee. In making the proposal, which renounced claims previously defended by Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat, the PA's chief negotiator, Saeb Erekat, is quoted as declaring sarcastically, "The only thing I cannot do is convert to Zionism."

Other documents illustrate the intimate collaboration between the Palestinian Authority and US and British intelligence in suppressing militant factions in the occupied territories and conspiring to overthrow Hamas in Gaza. The documents indicate that the PA was given advance warning of the 2008-2009 Israeli invasion of Gaza and bargained with the Israelis over the selection of Palestinian prisoners to be released with the open aim of boosting its image over that of its Islamist rivals.

All of these concessions produced precisely nothing from either Israel or its US ally. In an apparently emotional protest to Obama's Middle East envoy, George Mitchell, during an October 2009 meeting in Washington, Erekat is recorded as saying, "Nineteen years of promises and you haven't made up your minds what you want to do with us... We delivered on our road map obligations. Even Yuval Diskin [director of Shabak, Israel's internal security service] raises his hat on security. But no, they can't even give a six-month freeze [on settlements] to give me a fig leaf."

Washington, he complained, was interested only in "PR, quick news, and we're cost free." He warned that the failure of the "peace process" to produce anything for the Palestinians was undermining the usefulness of the PA in advancing US policy. "What good am I if I'm the joke of my wife, if I'm so weak."

As for the Israeli side, the documents quote then-Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni in a 2007 meeting providing a remarkably frank description of Tel Aviv's negotiating strategy, which has been guided by a determination to prevent any possibility of a viable Palestinian state. "The Israel policy is to take more and more land day after day and that at the end of the day we'll say that is impossible, we already have the land and we cannot create the [Palestinian] state," she said.

A similarly frank assessment as to the one-sided and fraudulent character of the "peace process" was offered by a former Israeli negotiator in an interview with the *Guardian*.

"What's so striking is not so much the nature of the concessions, it's that year after year they're pursuing the same strategy which not only shows itself to have failed but showed itself to be on a slope of constant Palestinian slippage," said the ex-negotiator, Daniel Levy. "They knew that the Israelis were pocketing whatever they gave, building more settlements and then saying: we need more land."

Levy continued: "The Palestinians never extracted themselves from that structurally losing proposition, especially the expectation that the Americans would deliver Israel because the Palestinians thought they were the ones being reasonable in the negotiations. But it didn't happen and it didn't happen. The Americans constantly sided with the unreasonable side and the Palestinians kept digging themselves deeper and deeper in to this losing proposition."

This assessment was confirmed by the reaction of the current government of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to the Al Jazeera report. It immediately seized upon the documents dealing with the sweeping concessions offered in relation to East Jerusalem to brand public demands by the Palestinian Authority for a freeze on construction there as "ridiculous."

The released papers "show that the Palestinian demand over the last year and a half to freeze construction in Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem is ridiculous, since it is clear that they had already conceded the aforementioned neighborhoods in negotiations during Olmert's tenure," the Israeli daily *Haaretz* quoted Israeli officials as saying.

The reality is that, no matter how great the concessions offered by the Palestinian side, neither Israel nor Washington have been interested in a settlement. The "peace talks," which have now broken down over Israel's refusal to provide even a temporary and partial freeze on new settlements, have served only as a means of exerting control over the Palestinian population and furthering imperialist intrigues in the broader Middle East.

In Washington, the State Department said it could not vouch for veracity of the documents, but acknowledged that they would have an impact. "We don't deny that this release will, at least for a time, make the situation more difficult than it already was," said spokesman Philip Crowley. "But again, we are clear-eyed about this. We always recognized that this would be a great challenge. But it hasn't—it doesn't change our overall objective."

Among the revelations contained in the documents is that the Obama administration tailored its policy even more closely to that of Israel than the Bush administration. In talks between Obama's envoy Mitchell and Palestinian negotiator Erekat in the autumn of 2009, Mitchell pushed the PA to cede to Israel's refusal to recognize the 1967 borders as the basis for negotiations on a Palestinian state.

When Erekat protested that the 1967 borders were part of the 2003 Road Map and had been specifically endorsed by the Bush administration barely a year earlier, Mitchell said Washington was not bound by these commitments.

"Again I tell you that President Obama does not accept prior decisions by Bush," the US envoy declared. "Don't use this because it can hurt you. Countries are bound by agreements—not discussions or statements."

The documents released by Al Jazeera have laid bare the real character of the so-called "peace process," which has been totally misrepresented by the media. From the beginning, it has served not as a means of ending the six-decade plight of the Palestinian people, but rather of legitimizing endless violence against them and of furthering US interests in the Middle East.

The prostration of the PA leadership exposed by these transcripts signals the dead-end of bourgeois nationalism throughout the Middle East and internationally.

The historic demands of the Palestinian people cannot be resolved through the pursuit of imperialist support for a bantustan-style statelet in the occupied territories. Only the mobilization of the working class—Palestinian and Israeli—and its unification based on a socialist and internationalist program can provide a way out of the present impasse and prevent a new round of murderous warfare.



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