

Israel visit by Jared Kushner confirms demise of Middle East peace process

Jean Shaoul

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The visit of Jared Kushner, President Donald Trump's son-in-law and advisor, and his daughter, Ivanka Trump, to Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) exposed for all to see that the so-called peace process is dead.

The visit, which followed several meetings with leaders in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan to discuss Trump's plans for the region, also included his special envoy to the Middle East, Jason Greenblatt, and Dina Powell, deputy national security adviser.

However, the inclusion of Kushner ends all pretence that Washington is acting as an "honest broker" between Israel and the Palestinians, and has exposed the growing crisis of Trump's foreign policy.

Kushner, whose pro-Israel bias is no secret to anyone, was reported to have said, in off-the-record comments to a casual gathering of congressional interns leaked to the media, that there may not be a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Coming just four months after Trump promised to present the "ultimate deal" to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, there were no proposals advanced, despite dozens of meetings between his administration and Israeli and Palestinian officials in the intervening period.

The last face-to-face talks between Israel, the most powerful-armed force in the Middle East, and the PA, bankrupt and heavily dependent upon funding from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf oil sheikdoms, took place more three years ago and lasted a few hours.

Following his three-hour-long meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Kushner praised him, saying, "We really appreciate the commitment of the prime minister and his team to engage very thoughtfully and respectfully in the way that the president has asked them to do."

Kushner also sought to flatter Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, telling him that Trump was very

appreciative of his efforts to suppress Palestinian unrest and his desire to achieve an agreement with Israel, despite the inevitable concessions.

He apparently told Abbas that the US was committed to making "supreme efforts" to broker a "historic peace" between Israelis and Palestinians, while Greenblatt said that Washington would soon formulate a detailed plan setting out Trump's vision of peace in the Middle East. That this was a lie was evidenced by the embarrassment when Abbas asked for the timetables and goals of the US moves.

Although the US refused to even endorse the "two-state solution," saying that doing so would bias Washington, Abbas said, "We affirm that this [US] delegation is working toward peace, and we are working with it to achieve soon what Trump called the 'peace deal'."

Just days earlier, Abbas had said he had met with US officials 20 times since Trump took office in January, but still had no idea what Israeli-Palestinian peace plan they have in mind. He said, "Each time they reiterate their commitment to a two-state solution and to stop settlement building. I urge them to tell [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu that, but they refrain."

Once again, he issued his futile threat to revive an international campaign for recognition of the PA as an independent state and go to the United Nations General Assembly in September if no real progress was made on their peace plan within 45 days.

The willingness of the corrupt PA to work with the US, Israel's paymaster, and accommodate itself to Trump's Middle East policy only serves to discredit Abbas and the PA even further in the eyes of the Palestinians. Abbas faces increasing domestic opposition to the PA's policing of the Palestinians on Israel's behalf.

Emboldened by Trump's support, Israel has expanded its West Bank settlements. According to Israel's Bureau of Statistics, 2,630 housing units were constructed or

partially constructed in West Bank settlements in 2016, an increase of 40 percent compared with 2015.

Last Monday, Netanyahu pledged he would not evacuate any settlements. He told a crowd of thousands at an event marking 50 years since the founding of the first settlement in the West Bank, “We are here to stay forever. There will be no more uprooting of settlements in the land of Israel.”

Furthermore, Netanyahu has insisted that Abbas and the PA recognise Israel as a Jewish state as a precondition for talks. Any such recognition would pave the way for Netanyahu to impose draconian measures on Israel’s Palestinian citizens, including loyalty oaths and an end to their demands for political reform—amid threats to move them to a Palestinian state and/or designate the Little Triangle as part of a Palestinian statelet in exchange for the annexation of the West Bank settlements. The Triangle and its main city, Umm al-Fahm, are home to around 300,000 Palestinian citizens and borders the West Bank.

Netanyahu has also been pushing a new basic law that would define Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people, rather than of Israel’s entire population, thereby weakening Israel’s Palestinians’ claim to citizenship. In a move tantamount to annexation, he has also backed legislation extending Jerusalem’s municipal borders to include several large settlements in the West Bank.

The PA has sought to bolster its position by renewing its contacts with European states and other states that supported it in previous UN votes, as well as seeking ties with China. Abbas visited Beijing last month, where President Xi Jinping said that China planned to initiate its own peace plan to advance talks between Israel and the Palestinians, whom he called “friends, partners and brothers.”

Washington’s going through the motions of seeking a resumption of peace talks is seen as necessary to provide the political cover for the imperialist powers’ ongoing interventions in the Middle East and increasing belligerency towards Iran. It takes place under conditions where the position of the US and its allies has been seriously weakened by the disastrous wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya and the debacle of the proxy war for regime change in Syria that has strengthened Tehran’s regional influence.

In the last few years, the Sunni Arab monarchs have worked closely with Israel against the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad in a bid to isolate Iran, and are preparing to normalise relations with Israel in the interests

of forging a broader alliance against Iran. But, facing increasingly restive and impoverished populations angry at their betrayal of the Palestinians, they cannot publicly work with Tel Aviv without making a show of supporting the Palestinians.

To this end, Saudi Arabia and its allies have even dropped their earlier demands for a “two-state solution” that would leave Palestinians trapped in a fragmented, Israeli-dominated mini-state. Now they merely call for minor concessions, such as the freezing of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and the easing of trade restrictions on the Gaza Strip. Even this is unacceptable to Netanyahu’s right-wing coalition government.

In moves seen as an attempt to placate the Arab masses, Trump stalled on his election campaign pledge to move the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and even hosted Abbas last May at the White House.

Egypt’s Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry had initially refused to meet Kushner in Cairo in protest over the US decision to withhold some \$300 million of military and financial aid, amid concerns over the military junta’s crackdown on dissent and human rights abuses.

French President Emmanuel Macron is to visit the Middle East, including Israel and the Palestinian territories, next spring. He told a meeting of French ambassadors, “We will continue our efforts with the United Nations to find a two-state solution, Israel and Palestine, living safely side-by-side within borders recognised by the international community, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states.”

His purpose, too, is to pose as a friend to the Palestinian people, under conditions where his forces are playing an escalating role in military operations in the Middle East and North Africa.



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