

Trump's Middle East deal and the dead end of bourgeois nationalism

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The obscene spectacle staged by the Trump administration on the South Lawn of the White House on Tuesday, bringing together the two monarchical Arab dictatorships, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, with Israel for the signing of what were pretentiously labeled the “Abraham Accords,” represents yet one more link in the decades-long chain of betrayals carried out by the Arab bourgeoisie.

The “Abraham Accords,” all of five paragraphs in length, manage to repeat the name “Donald J. Trump” four times, lest anyone should forget who is the champion of Middle East peace in the midst of his reelection bid, which threatens to bring the US itself to the brink of civil war.

For Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the trip to Washington served as a welcome diversion from a spiraling crisis in Israel, which is gripped by soaring coronavirus infections, a deepening economic crisis and mass protests, even as he himself faces imminent indictment on fraud and bribery charges.

As for the royal Arab signatories, the bowing and scraping before Trump was a price they were more than willing to pay for increased US security aid and the chance to buy advanced military hardware, including F-35 fighter jets.

The “Accords” proclaim that they will “commence a new chapter of peace” in the Middle East. What a farce! The formalization of ties between the Sunni Gulf oil sheikdoms and Israel is part of Washington’s strategy of forging an anti-Iranian axis in preparation for a potentially world-catastrophic war aimed at regime-change in Tehran and the rolling back of both Chinese and Russian influence in the region.

As for the quest for Middle East peace, historically it has been predicated, at least formally, on resolving the plight of the Palestinians, including the 4.75 million living under Israeli occupation, the nearly two million living as second-class citizens in Israel itself and the millions more scattered among refugee camps in neighboring Arab countries and in a wider diaspora.

What the Israeli-Emirati-Bahraini deal made clear is that for world imperialism and the Arab bourgeois regimes, the Palestinian issue is no longer considered an issue at all. It has done away with the fiction, codified in the so-called Arab Peace Plan drafted by Saudi Arabia, that “normalization” of relations between the Arab states and Tel Aviv was dependent upon Israel withdrawing from territories it occupied in the 1967 war and allowing the formation of a Palestinian state: the so-called “two state solution.” Indeed, when Palestinian representatives proposed that the Arab League

adopt a resolution condemning the UAE’s deal with Israel, they were dismissed out of hand.

This “normalization” process has a long and bitter history. Trump’s “peace” farce on Tuesday was meant to evoke previous US-brokered deals, including the September 1978 Camp David Accords, signed by Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, which assured Israel the neutrality and outright collaboration of the Arab world’s largest nation in its conflicts with the Palestinians.

This was followed 15 years later by the Oslo Accords, signed on the White House lawn by Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in September 1993, in which Arafat agreed to recognize Israel and guarantee its security, while renouncing the armed struggle for Palestinian liberation with which the PLO had long been identified.

This inaugurated the nearly three-decade “peace process,” which has served as a cover for the vast expansion of Israeli settlements and theft of Palestinian land in the West Bank and successive bloody wars and a punishing blockade against the 1.8 million Palestinians trapped in the open-air prison of Gaza.

Under the Oslo Accords, the PLO took charge of the political monstrosity known as the Palestinian Authority (PA) in a process that involved the unexplained death of Arafat in 2004. His successor, Mahmoud Abbas, has served as the unelected president of the PA for 15 years, running a regime that serves to enrich a thin layer of the Palestinian bourgeoisie off of aid kickbacks, while providing a vital auxiliary police force to suppress the population of the West Bank in the interests of Israel and imperialism.

This transformation of the PLO, the most radical of the bourgeois nationalist movements, which enlisted tens of thousands of Palestinians in the unequal combat with Israel, underwent countless sacrifices and assassinations of its leaders and inspired masses of the oppressed throughout the Middle East, was part of a universal process.

All of the national movements that gained prominence from the 1950s to the 1970s—from Nasserism and Ba’athism in the Middle East, to Pan-Africanism and Peronism, Castroism and Sandinismo in Latin America—advancing national liberation as some separate stage of development, achievable through the suppression of any independent revolutionary intervention of the working class for socialism, have proven bankrupt. So too have the Stalinist, Maoist and Pabloite revisionist proponents of national liberation

movements based upon the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry as a substitute for resolving the crisis of revolutionary leadership in the working class.

The surrender and transformation of the PLO was prepared over a protracted period of bloody betrayals produced by the Faustian bargains struck by its leadership with various Arab bourgeois regimes as well as the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy. Their limited and highly unreliable support was conditioned on the PLO's forswearing any revolutionary appeal to the masses of workers and oppressed of the Arab world.

The result was an endless succession of stabs in the back at the hands of the Palestinians' Arab patrons and "brothers." This extended from the 1970 "Black September" massacre of Palestinians by the Jordanian monarchy, to the Syrian backing of the Lebanese Falangist slaughter of Palestinians at the Karantina and Tel al-Zaatar camps in 1975, to the complicity of Syria and all of the Arab regimes in allowing the US-backed Israeli invasion of 1982 to expel the PLO from Lebanon.

The PLO's attempts to base its survival on maneuvers between the different Arab regimes and by exploiting the Cold War conflicts between Washington and the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy were fatally undermined by the profound changes in world capitalism that coincided with its military defeat.

The 1982 Lebanon invasion was part of a global counteroffensive made possible by the betrayals and defeats of the worldwide mass struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. The growing global integration of capitalist production, meanwhile, eliminated the relationship of forces upon which the PLO had depended. The Stalinist bureaucracy's capitalist restorationist policy and ultimate liquidation of the Soviet Union was accompanied by the sharp turn by supposedly nationalist Arab regimes toward ever closer collaboration with imperialism, consummated in the support given by many of them to the 1991 US war against Iraq.

This process was accompanied by the outbreak of the first *intifada*, a spontaneous rebellion among workers and youth in the occupied territories. This revolt developed independently and over the opposition of the PLO leadership, which feared that such a struggle from below would fatally undermine its project of establishing an independent bourgeois state in collaboration with imperialism.

This bourgeois nationalist project has reached a complete dead end. Israeli "facts on the ground" in the years since the signing of the Oslo Accords have included a relentless growth of settlements in the occupied territories, the division of what little remained of the West Bank outside of direct Israeli control by walls, security roads and countless checkpoints and its separation from Gaza and Jerusalem. The conception that the carving out of a Bantustan-style "independent" state will improve the desperate conditions of the masses of Palestinians is today patently absurd.

In July 1939, little more than a year before his death at the hands of a Stalinist assassin, the great Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky wrote presciently about the premier nationalist movement, the Indian Congress Party (from which the African National Congress of Nelson Mandela in South Africa would take its name):

The Indian bourgeoisie is incapable of leading a revolutionary struggle. They are closely bound up with and dependent upon British capitalism. They tremble for their own property. They stand in fear of the masses. They seek compromises with British imperialism no matter what the price and lull the Indian masses with hopes of reforms from above. The leader and prophet of this bourgeoisie is Gandhi. A fake leader and a false prophet.

This characteristic of the bourgeois nationalist movements in the colonial countries exposed by Trotsky in the 1930s has been fully borne out by the subsequent, and in many cases tragic, developments in the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Historical experience—including the latest betrayals of the Arab bourgeoisie—has provided the irrefutable vindication of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, which guided the Russian Revolution of October 1917. It established that in the oppressed countries and those with a belated capitalist development, the democratic and national tasks that in an earlier historical epoch were associated with the rise of the bourgeoisie can, in the epoch of imperialism, be achieved only through the independent revolutionary mobilization of the working class based on a socialist and internationalist perspective.

The liberation of the Palestinian people and an end to the imperialist wars that have killed and maimed millions in the Middle East will never be achieved through imperialist-brokered "peace" negotiations or the fantasy of a "two-state solution." The only way forward lies in the independent mobilization and unification of Arab, Jewish and Iranian workers in a common struggle for a Socialist Federation of the Middle East as part of the fight to put an end to capitalism all over the world.



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