

Europe, Wake up and Smell the Coffee: Palestine and “Netanyahu’s Breakfast in Brussels”

Netanyahu’s Israel openly mocks the values that Europe claims to hold dear. When will European leaders stand up and reject the unacceptable reality of the past 50 years?

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Global Research, December 11, 2017

[+972 Magazine](#) 10 December 2017

Region: [Europe, Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

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Featured image: Israeli soldiers arrest a Palestinian boy during protests against Donald Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, Hebron, West Bank, December 7, 2017. (Wisam Hashlamoun/Flash90)

European foreign ministers attending Prime Minister Netanyahu’s breakfast in Brussels this Monday may find their thoughts wandering, as the guest of honor once again speaks of Iran, self-indulgent whining of “[double standards](#),” and “the only democracy in the Middle East.” Some breakfasts are more difficult to swallow than others.

And so, given [a recent speech](#) by a certain American president, the attending ministers’ thoughts may drift — perhaps to the occupied Palestinian territories. They may ask themselves some of the questions Israeli governments have consistently refused to address, such as: given how Israel’s grasp over the West Bank is being further cemented, why does Netanyahu’s government even bother to [pay lip service to](#) the “peace process?” And isn’t Israel’s policy of [forced displacement](#) of Palestinians from parts of the occupied territories a war crime? How many [hours of electricity](#) a day does Israel plan to ration for the 2 million Palestinians living at its doorstep in the Gaza Strip next week? And, embassy fanfare aside, what about the 370,000 Palestinians in East Jerusalem, living [with no political rights](#) since Israel’s annexation half a century ago?

Such unanswered questions may leave one’s mouth dry, and so the very same questions may percolate closer to home. For if Israel continues to cement its grasp all over the West Bank, why does Europe take seriously the occasional Israeli lip service to the “peace process?” And as Israel’s policy of forcibly displacing Palestinians from parts of the occupied territories *is* indeed a war crime, what is the EU’s effective counteraction? And for how much longer will the lie of “Israeli democracy,” alongside a 21st-century version of institutionalized oppression and dispossession, be accepted at Europe’s doorstep?

Here’s a caffeine shot: it is all good and well to forever be disappointed by others while standing by and watching as unilateral moves become *fait accompli*. But it is Europe that has worn away its own credibility for years by repeatedly “expressing concern” over “the eroding possibility” of bringing an end to the occupation. How long can a position be eroded before it is wholly ground to dust courtesy of an Israeli bulldozer?

Yet thanks to the sheer bluntness of current American positions and Israeli actions, Europe can no longer pretend with any degree of credibility that the policy it is pursuing is one of supporting an American-led “peace process.” Such self-evident fiction undercuts Palestinians striving for freedom; Israeli human rights defenders striving for justice; and Europe’s values-driven vision towards a future based on the rule of law, human rights, and democracy.

The guest at Monday’s breakfast openly mocks these values, yet somehow here he is — white tablecloth, croissants, and dignitaries listening politely. In July 2017, in a meeting in Budapest with the prime ministers of Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia, [Netanyahu repeatedly called the EU](#) “crazy” for being “the only association of countries in the world that conditions the relations with Israel... on political conditions.” Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán chimed in alongside, from his intra-EU perspective. Budapest and Jerusalem seem to be sharing more and more values these days.

As Israel’s number one trade partner, Europe has all the leverage it needs to inform Israeli voters that they cannot continue to have it both ways – enjoy perks justified by presumed shared democratic values, all while trampling those very values. Raising the stakes, Netanyahu is now pushing to further leverage the silencing effect of false accusations conflating the rejection of the perpetual occupation with “incitement to anti-Semitism”, while at the same time cashing in on internal European divisions. He thus aims to sideline even the modest, ineffective conditionality that has existed to date. And he, or his successor, will market such an achievement to Israeli voters as a sign that Israelis can in fact continue having it both ways.

By continuing to express “serious concern” instead of acting, Europe is deciding to allow others to lead the way, and *de facto* accepting the abundantly clear consequences. Trump’s America is far away from all this, both geographically and morally: it is shielded by an ocean, and outspoken in alignment with Putin, Duterte, Orbán – and Netanyahu. While America is distant, all this is unfolding in Europe’s immediate neighborhood. Out of sheer self-interest, can Europe withstand the consequences of abandoning the values underpinning its post-WW2 project?

It is high time to stop waiting for Washington, Moscow, Budapest or Jerusalem. It is time to stand up for human rights, to demand nothing short of an end to the occupation, and to spell out how European leadership will effectively reject the unacceptable reality of the past 50 years. Backed by an almost global consensus reiterated in last year’s UN Security Council resolution 2334, in solidarity with Palestinians and like-minded Israelis, and together with international actors near and far – this is a task to be realized by a genuine coalition committed to non-violence, human rights, and justice. Europe, wake up.

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