

Remembering June 1967 and the Conquest of Palestine. Trump's Visit to Israel

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I arrived in Jerusalem last night and as always during the weeks between mid-May and mid-June the media is full of romanticized memories. Within these weeks are the two most significant dates in modern Palestinian history: May 1948 when Palestine was conquered and renamed Israel, and June, 1967 when the Israeli army completed the conquest of Palestine by taking East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. For Palestinians these dates bring back bitter memories, but for Israelis the memories are sweet – those were the days when we were young and brave and innocent. Vintage photos of soldiers at the newly conquered Western Wall, generals announcing “the Temple Mount is in our hands,” and teary-eyed old Jews praying with devotion are everywhere. The horrors that make up the Palestinian memories, the piles of dead bodies, civilians panicking as they are forcibly exiled, children lost in the mayhem and ancient villages and communities bulldozed only to be rebuilt for Jews are rarely shown or discussed.



Israeli Generals Dayan, Narkis and Bar-Lev at the Western Wall



Palestinian refugees fleeing to Jordan across the wrecked Alenbi Bridge



Destruction of the 700 year old Mughrabi neighborhood was done immediately following the Israeli conquest of East Jerusalem to create the Western Wall plaza.

To add to all that, Donald Trump is expected to arrive in Jerusalem and this gives the press and the official state PR machine an even greater opportunity to deal with the two things they love best: smoke screens and trivia. Gaza? never even heard of it! Fifteen hundred innocent political prisoners on a hunger strike for over a month? Nobody cares! But check this out: apparently Trump will fly directly from Saudi Arabia to Tel-Aviv and this is the first direct flight between the two countries; the King David Hotel in Jerusalem is preparing

for Trump's visit and a drone was spotted in the hotel parking lot! And the ongoing burning question, will the great deal maker be able to close the Israeli-Palestinian peace Deal? All smoke screens and trivia which are the staples of tabloids – a category into which most Israeli media outlets fit perfectly – though in their defense one must admit that there is no point in dealing with substance because Trump's visit will offer none.

Here are a few items that are sure not to be on Trump's agenda: Two million people in Gaza have no access to clean water, proper nutrition or medicine. They have been victims of devastating attacks for seven decades and before they can recover from one assault there is another one pending. The Israeli water authority allocates only 3% of the water to Palestinians even though they make up more than 50% of the overall population. More than 55% of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship live below the poverty line, and even though they rate one of the highest in the world in literacy, there is massive unemployment among Palestinians. Palestinians in the West Bank live under a brutal military regime governed by Israeli commanders who impose inhumane laws and prevent people from enjoying the basic most human rights. Seven thousand political prisoners sit in Israeli jails in violation of international law, over fifteen hundred of them on a hunger strike for over a month.

Trump may also visit Ramallah, and there too these topics are not likely to come up. Though there are attempts to prop the legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority, it is on life support and barely surviving. Municipal elections to West Bank cities were a failure – marked by boycotts of major political parties and a lack of voter interest. Mahmoud Abbas, the so-called president of the Palestinian Authority is old and tired and can no longer mask his disinterest in the fate of his people. Hamas has made some changes to its charter and the newly elected head of Hamas' political bureau is the Gaza resident, Gaza born Ismail Haniya, who is also the democratically elected Prime Minister of the now defunct Palestinian Authority. The Authority has no real authority and neither party is relevant anymore.

The question of moving the US embassy to Jerusalem is also dead at this point although for political reasons Netanyahu will pretend it is a priority. Both Trump and Netanyahu know that Jerusalem is a red line that even two reckless politicians such as them will not dare cross. Trump will not risk a multi billion dollar weapons deal with Saudi Arabia, and Netanyahu won't risk an uprising for a symbolic gesture for which no country in the world can give its support. The international community has never recognized Jerusalem as part of Israel, and international recognition of Israel's jurisdiction is out of the question. So while Israeli politicians may try to create headlines over this topic, it is nothing but a smoke screen.

The terror under which Palestinians live – be it in their own country or in refugee camps around it, is part of the daily bread of Palestinian existence. The causes for this existence, the wars of 1948 and 1967 are commemorated each year during the weeks between mid-May and mid-June. The horror of the Palestinian reality is magnified when compared to the dishonest, romanticized narrative presented by Jews during that time: An Israel that is eternally young and brave and facing constant danger, yet winning and succeeding. Judging by Trump's entourage, which includes David Friedman the new US ambassador to Israel and Jared Kushner, the famous Jewish son in law, Israel's narrative of lies will dominate the agenda, while trivia and smoke screens will dominate the news.

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