

The Illegal Occupation of Palestine: Israel's Festivities will Highlight 50 Years of Shame

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Israel is to hold lavish celebrations over the coming weeks to mark the 50th anniversary of what it calls the "liberation of Judea, Samaria and the Golan Heights" – or what the rest of us describe as the birth of the occupation.

The centrepiece event will take place in Gush Etzion, south of Jerusalem. The West Bank settlement "bloc" enjoys wide support in Israel, not least because it was established long ago by the supposedly left-wing Labour party, now heading the opposition.

The jubilee is a potent reminder that for Israelis, most of whom have never known a time before the occupation, Israel's rule over the Palestinians seems as irreversible as the laws of nature. But the extravagance of the festivities also underscores the growth over five decades of Israel's self-assurance as an occupier.

Documents found this month in Israel's archives reveal that, when Israel captured East Jerusalem in 1967, its first concern was to hoodwink the international community.

The foreign ministry ordered Israel's ambassadors to mischaracterise its illegal annexation of East Jerusalem as a simple "municipal fusion". To avoid diplomatic reprisals, Israel claimed it was necessary to ease the provision of essential services to the occupied Palestinian population.

Interestingly, those drafting the order advised that the deception was unlikely to succeed. The United States had already insisted that Israel commit no unilateral moves.

But within months Israel had evicted thousands of Palestinians from the Old City and destroyed their homes. Washington and Europe have been turning a blind eye to such actions ever since.

One of the Zionist movement's favourite early slogans was: "Dunam after dunam, goat after goat". The seizure of small areas of territory measured in dunams, the demolition of the odd home, and the gradual destruction of herding animals would slowly drive the Palestinians off most of their land, "liberating" it for Jewish colonisation. If it was done piecemeal, the objections from overseas would remain muffled. It has proved a winning formula.

Fifty years on, the colonisation of East Jerusalem and the West Bank is so entrenched that a two-state solution is nothing more than a pipe dream.

Nonetheless, US president Donald Trump has chosen this inauspicious moment to dispatch

an envoy, Jason Greenblatt, to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



In a “goodwill” response, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has unveiled a framework for settlement building. It is exactly the kind of formula for deception that has helped Israel consolidate the occupation since 1967.

Mr Netanyahu says expansion will be “restricted” to “previously developed” settlements, or “adjacent” areas, or, depending on the terrain, “land close” to a settlement.

Peace Now points out that the settlements already have jurisdiction over some 10 per cent of the West Bank, while far more is treated as “state land”. The new framework, says the group, gives the settlers a green light to “build everywhere”.

The Trump White House has shrugged its shoulders. A statement following Mr Netanyahu’s announcement judged the settlements no “impediment to peace”, adding that Israel’s commitments to previous US administrations would be treated as moot.

Effectively, the US is wiping the slate clean, creating a new baseline for negotiations after decades of Israeli changes stripping the Palestinians of territory and rights.

Although none of this bodes well, Egypt and Jordan’s leaders met Mr Trump this month to push for renewed talks between Israel and the Palestinians. The White House is said to be preparing to welcome the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas. Some senior Palestinians are rightly wary. Abbas Zaki, a Fatah leader, fears Mr Trump will try to impose a regional solution on Arab states, over Mr Abbas’s head, designed to “eliminate the Palestinian cause altogether”.

David Ben Gurion, Israel’s founding father, reportedly once said:

“What matters is not what the goyim [non-Jews] say, but what the Jews do.”

For nearly a quarter of a century, the Oslo accords dangled an illusory peace carrot that usefully distracted the global community as Israel nearly quadrupled its settler population, making even a highly circumscribed Palestinian state unrealisable. Now, that game plan is about to be revived in new form. While the US, Israel, Jordan and Egypt focus on the hopeless task of creating a regional framework for peace, Israel will be left undisturbed once again to seize more dunams and more goats.



In Israel, the debate is no longer simply about whether to build settler homes, or about how many can be justified. Government ministers argue instead about the best moment to annex vast areas of the West Bank

associated with so-called settlement blocs such as Gush Etzion.

Israel's imminent celebrations should lay to rest any confusion that the occupation is still considered temporary. But when occupation becomes permanent, it metamorphoses into something far uglier.

It is past time to recognise that Israel has established an apartheid regime and one that serves as a vehicle for incremental ethnic cleansing. If there are to be talks, ending that outrage must be their first task.

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