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A Synopsis of the Nodal Points of the Palestine Issue

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Donald Trump's latest post on his account, in which he presents his vision to transform and reconstruct Gaza into a Riviera by displacing 2.1 million Palestinians, absurd as it may seem, unravels two distinct assumptions: first, it is merely an indifferent contribution to a puzzling situation that has remained unresolved since the beginning of the previous century; and second, it is yet another proposition that excludes one of the key variables in the equation: the Palestinians.

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Beginning with the British withdrawal from Palestine after they failed to propose a viable solution, the newly formed and inexperienced United Nations assumed responsibility for designing and implementing a just resolution. This attempt led to the United Nations Partition Plan proposed in 1947. The Partition Plan ended the British mandate in Palestine and proposed the establishment of two separate states, each with its own autonomous government, national bank, and free access to Jerusalem. Every individual would have the right to choose where to live, regardless of their nationality, but with the right to participate only in the electoral process of their national group. Moreover, both states would engage in joint development initiatives under the guidance of the appointed Finance Commission. The Partition Plan also regulated the borders between the two states and would allow them to submit membership requests to the United Nations once they achieved full autonomy. Regarding Jerusalem's status, the Partition Plan proposed that it would remain demilitarized, with an autonomous government and international representation. The two official languages would be Arabic and Hebrew. Finally, the city's governor would be responsible for preserving its cultural heritage and ensuring peaceful coexistence between Palestinians and Jews.[1]

However, despite the fact that the Partition Plan appeared to be an inclusive proposal, it was ultimately rejected not only by the Palestinians but also by other Arabs in the region. The reason was that agreeing to the plan would have meant arbitrarily giving away land to the Zionists settlers. At best, according to British estimates at the time the Zionist settlers constituted approximately 30% especially after WWII. On the other hand, Western powers sought to make reparations for the atrocities of the Holocaust by granting land to the Jews, without considering the Palestinian people who already lived there, as an attempt to redeem themselves for the suffering of the Jews in Europe. The British, on their part, were eager to find a resolution. Beyond being exhausted on the European front during WWII, Zionist groups – who were once cooperative with in the British forces in Palestine- had launched a number of terrorist attacks against them, so as to pressure them into handing the Zionists what was promised to the Jewish people in Balfour's Declaration of 1917; the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish People.[2]

Ultimately, the Partition Plan proved unsuccessful in resolving the tense situation. The state of Israel was established and almost two years later, an armistice treaty was signed between Egypt and Israel as a precondition for eliminating any threats to peace in Palestine. The armistice treaty included the peaceful withdrawal of Egyptian and Israeli military forces under international supervision and regulated the western and eastern frontiers of Palestine.[3]

Another series of efforts to resolve the Israel-Palestine issue began after the Six-Day War in 1967. Starting with the pivotal United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, the UN called for the withdrawal of Israeli military forces from the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula in exchange for recognition of the state of Israel by the Arab nations.[4] However, this resolution did not directly refer to Palestine but rather to the recognition of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Ten years later, President Jimmy Carter invited Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to Camp David, taking advantage of Sadat's desire to regain the Sinai Peninsula and Begin's willingness, as a newly elected leader, to consider Carter's suggestions. The final agreement, known as the Camp David Accords, stipulated the withdrawal of Israeli military forces from the occupied Gaza Strip and West Bank after the election of legitimate governments in both areas. Moreover, the agreement designated Egypt, Jordan, and Israel as supervisors for the establishment of the newly elected governments. Prior to this, Jordan and Israel were responsible for border control and internal policing in Gaza and the West Bank.

The agreement also foresaw the beginning of a five-year transitional period after the establishment of legitimate governments. Within three years of this transitional period, the new governments were to begin negotiations with Israel and their neighbors to establish their authority and create police forces for internal and external security. Meanwhile, Israel would withdraw its forces, maintaining only a small presence in certain locations related to its security, with Israeli and Jordanian police forces conducting border patrols. The transitional period was intended to end once two committees—one for the final

status of Gaza and the West Bank, comprising Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and the newly elected governments, and another for the peace process between Israel, Jordan, and the elected governments—had made significant progress.[5]

However, the Camp David Accords highlighted not only the absence of the Palestinians from a summit related to their interests, but also the way they were used by the involved parties to achieve their goals. For example, Sadat was unwilling to sacrifice Egypt's interests for the sake of the other Arabs. On the contrary, he wanted to profit from the United States' involvement while maintaining Egypt's image intact in the Arab world. That is why he included the Palestinian issue in the negotiations, hoping to extract a statement from Begin where the latter would agree to the right of Palestinians to self-determination or declare that Israel would withdraw from the territories it held after the 1967 war. In reality, Sadat was not prepared for a separate peace. However, even if Begin had been more willing, Israeli society and political parties were not ready to accept such a declaration. In the end, the final agreement included the Palestinians only in the last step of the implementation and only if Jordan agreed to participate in the negotiations. Ultimately, the Camp David Accords left Israel with one less enemy.[6]

It was not until the events of the first Intifada in 1987, the end of the Gulf War in 1991, and the collapse of the Soviet Union that the United States decided it was the right time to resume negotiations. The first instance of agreement between Palestinians and Israelis came in the Oslo process, which Norway mediated. Signed in Washington in 1993, the Oslo Accords outlined key provisions for resolving the Palestinian issue.[7]

Nevertheless, the only provisions that were materialized were the creation of autonomous governments in Gaza and the West Bank, the establishment of a five-year transitional council under international monitoring, and Israeli responsibility for policing and border controls. Thereon, crucial issues were either neglected or were meant to be negotiated at a later stage. Not addressing issues like borders, refugees, settlers, and relations with neighboring countries, the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho, the transfer of key services like education and health to the council, the establishment of Palestinian authorities for economic development, the water management program, and collaboration on energy, resources, transportation, foreign investments, and trade had left the agreement vulnerable.[8]

Though the Oslo Accords marked an important moment in which Israel recognized the PLO as a legitimate interlocutor, they were insufficient to resolve the complex issue of Palestine. This began with the omission of Israel as an occupying force, the acceptance of Israel's authority to choose from which occupied Palestinian territory it would withdraw, the establishment of a three-zone administrative model in the West Bank (Hebron Protocol, 1997), and the omission of Palestinian rights to statehood, borders, and equality in the Declaration of Principles. All of these events reflect a reproduction of the power imbalance between the signatories in the final agreement, gradually leading to the imposition of Israeli interests on the Palestinians. This reality is also evident in the period between 1993 and 2000, during which the number of settlers doubled, and the Palestinian economy deteriorated, leading to an increase in poverty, child labor [9] and unemployment rates.[10] Additionally, it became impossible for Palestinians to travel between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip due to Israeli checkpoints and border control policies. In the end, the Palestinian Authority, under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, decided to break the already fragile agreement by initiating the second Intifada.[11]

Following the Second Intifada in 2000 and the Failure of the Oslo Accords, the United Nations, the United States, the European Union, and Russia proposed a similar process, but it also yielded no positive outcome. Initiatives such as the Israeli disengagement plan failed after Hamas won the 2007 elections in Gaza. The only initiative that may matter, is the Arab Peace Initiative proposed at the Beirut Arab Summit in 2002. The initiative had three main provisions: the recognition of Israel by all Arab states in exchange for Israel's withdrawal from all territories occupied in the 1967 war, the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, and a just solution for the resettlement of Palestinian refugees. Especially since the Abraham Accords, which has bridged relations between some key Arab powers and Israel, the members of the Arab Initiative, UAE and Bahrain particularly, can use their economic and commercial ties with Israel and their potential financial aid to Palestine as leverage so as to de-escalate the situation and promote a roadmap to peace.[12]

Today, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has escalated like never before with a new cycle of violence and atrocities. The dire situation in Gaza signals the need for an immediate response from the international community. This new agreement should be in the mutual interest of all parties, rather than being biased by the rule of the strongest. It should foster a culture of negotiation among the populations of both sides and strive to rectify the mistakes of the past.

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