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# **FAKE PEACE**

**Netanyahu's Deception:  
Remarketing Israeli Control  
of the Palestinians Under  
the Guise of Peace**

הליכוד

מדדה  
הליכוד  
בראשות נתניהו

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**FAKE PEACE**  
**NETANYAHU'S DECEPTION:**  
**REMARKETING ISRAELI CONTROL OF THE**  
**PALESTINIANS UNDER THE GUISE OF PEACE**

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# INTRODUCTION

On 13 August 2020, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu posted the following text on his Twitter page: "Today we usher in a new era of peace between Israel and the Arab world. We decided to establish full and formal peace between Israel and the United Arab Emirates. There will be more Arab and Muslim countries joining the peace circle with us. True peace - not a slogan. Peace that derives from power, peace for peace."<sup>1</sup>

As part of the normalization of diplomatic relations with the UAE, described by Netanyahu as the establishment of peace, it was decided to renounce the plan to unilaterally annex approximately one third of the West Bank. This plan, which had been on the agenda since the beginning of 2020 within "the deal of the century," was a key Netanyahu promise in the latest election campaign, waiting to be executed.

The year 2020 was indeed full of political developments in the Palestinian arena: in January, the "deal of the century" was launched, and in August the normalization agreement was announced. In fact, in the space of eight months, Netanyahu and Trump managed both to bombastically announce annexation ("Today, Israel is taking a giant step toward peace [...] A historic breakthrough [...]. It's a great plan for Israel. It's a great plan for peace"<sup>2</sup>) and to abandon it in favor of another historic "peace."

What these two moves have in common is that both involved deceiving the public and were marketed in a biased and misleading manner. "The deal of the century" was called a "peace agreement," although it was essentially a biased unilateral annexation plan imposed on the Palestinians as a *fait accompli*. The move with the UAE was also described as a "peace agreement," despite the fact that Israel has never been in conflict with the UAE and the two countries have enjoyed unofficial ties for three decades. Another common denominator of the two moves is that although in both cases the Palestinians were completely excluded from the process, both have a direct and far-reaching impact on the Palestinian people.

This position paper aims to review the deceptive manner in which the normalization agreement with the UAE was packaged, marketed and sold to the public. To this end, we will first try to study the nature of the deception and its components, by examining Netanyahu's messages versus the reality and pointing to the differences between the two, as well as by noting how the deception serves Netanyahu personally. The normalization

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<sup>1</sup> [Netanyahu's Twitter page](#), 13 August 2020 (Hebrew)

<sup>2</sup> [President Trump and Israeli Prime Minister on Middle East Plan](#), C-Span, 28 January 2020

of relations with the UAE allowed Netanyahu to elegantly withdraw from the annexation plan that had already lost feasibility and momentum, while not only portraying himself as an irreplaceable illustrious statesman but also attempting to convince the Israeli public that a settlement with the Palestinians could be reached without an Israeli quid pro quo ("peace for peace," as he calls it).

Next, we will look at the price that these moves exact from the Palestinians, and the ensuing damage and continued violation of their human rights. First and foremost, Netanyahu's moves contribute to the perpetuation of the occupation and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as they create new conditions that further distance the two sides from the ability to reach a diplomatic solution. Furthermore, these moves not only accord legitimacy to the occupation but also to the creeping annexation taking place under its auspices and contribute to depicting both as reasonable and normal.

Whether these moves were planned as such in advance or shaped up on the go, it is the Palestinians who each time anew are called upon to pay the price for the Netanyahu-Trump moves. This is because as part of the aforementioned marketing deception, Netanyahu keeps taking steps that deepen, exacerbate, perpetuate and, above all, normalize Israel's control over the Palestinians and the harm it inflicts on them, gift-wrapping them in a glossy "peace" package tied up in ribbons of US approval and Arab legitimacy. In any case, when Netanyahu seeks to promote a diplomatic move that will serve him, strengthen his political power and accord legitimacy to our military control of the territories, he does not hesitate to deceive the public, spread blatant lies and hide the truth.

# CHAPTER 1: THE DECEPTION

## 1. REMARKETING REALITY

In the opening episode of "Mad Men," a TV series about the New York advertising world in the 1950-1960s, there is a famous scene dealing with the efforts to find a marketing strategy for Lucky Strike after the Federal Trade Commission announced that cigarettes cause cancer and the ensuing drastic drop in sales. Don Draper, an advertising wiz and the main character of the series, realizes that he must find a slogan that will not only differentiate Lucky Strike from other cigarettes, but also dispel the fear of smokers. He asks the company owner to describe how his cigarettes are produced, and as the man describes the process - a process that has remained unchanged since the company was founded ("We breed insect-resistant tobacco seeds, plant them in the North Carolina sunshine, grow it, cut it, cure it, toast it") - Draper comes up with the winning slogan: "Lucky Strike - it's toasted." When the man notes that competing cigarettes are also toasted, Draper replies: "No. Everybody else's tobacco is poisonous. Lucky Strike is toasted."<sup>3</sup>

Just like the toasting process in cigarette production, there is not much that is new in the agreement with the UAE. Just like the toasting process was moved upfront to deceive the public, distract attention from the risks of smoking and paint Lucky Strike as a positive and tempting product, so is Netanyahu's move a deception designed to remarket the occupation to the Israeli public as a risk-free adventure that carries a negligible price. There is a gap between the fact that in many ways these diplomatic moves merely preserve the status quo, and their framing as "historic" achievements that symbolize a "new era."

Israel has never had a substantial conflict with the UAE.<sup>4</sup> The two countries do not share a border, have no conflict over resources or territory, and have never fought each other.<sup>5</sup> In fact, until Netanyahu's announcement, very few Israelis felt the absence of such an agreement. The agreement with the UAE is actually a formalization of relations that began to crystalize in the 1990s and have continued ever since, albeit covertly. Minister Ephraim Sneh secretly visited Dubai back in 2001 in connection with the campaign against the Iranian threat, and Israel held contacts with UAE officials in 2005 in the context of the disengagement from Gaza. Since then, Israel and the UAE have maintained informal contacts on economic, commercial, security and diplomatic issues.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [Script of pilot episode, Mad Men](#), pages 36-40; [Lucky Strike scene](#), Mad Men, YouTube

<sup>4</sup> [How the UAE and Saudi Arabia Now Hold Israel Hostage](#), Elie Podeh, Mitvim Institute, Haaretz, 26 August 2020

<sup>5</sup> [The New Normalization: What's Behind Israelis' 'Indifferent Support' for Historic UAE Deal](#), Noa Landau, Haaretz, 31 August 2020

<sup>6</sup> [How the UAE and Saudi Arabia Now Hold Israel Hostage](#), Elie Podeh, Mitvim Institute, Haaretz, 26 August 2020; [Palestinians Slam 'Betrayal' by UAE in Deal With Israel: 'Reward of the Occupation's Crimes'](#), Jackie Huri and Noa Landau, Haaretz, 13 August 2020

In this sense, the decision to describe the deal as a "peace agreement" involves a two-fold deception: not only are most of the elements of any peace agreement (primarily the cessation of hostilities and the demarcation of borders) absent from it, but those that are included in it were first established 30 years ago.

## 2. ESTABLISHING NEW PARADIGM IN ISRAELI PUBLIC DISCOURSE: PEACE FOR PEACE

When Netanyahu says, "I have the great privilege to make the third peace treaty between Israel and an Arab country,"<sup>7</sup> he is seeking to reactivate the positive public sentiment toward the peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan. However, one must keep in mind that while these peace agreements were signed during periods when the conventional model was of land for peace, in the present case Netanyahu devotes considerable effort to dismantling the old model and introducing an alternative message. A photo collage recently posted on his Facebook page describes the peace treaty with Egypt as "territories for peace" and the Gaza disengagement as "rockets for peace."<sup>8</sup> This time around we got "peace for peace," Netanyahu affirms, and he has made sure to repeat this mantra ever since.

However, this is deceptive as well, and not just because it is not a peace agreement at all. Despite Netanyahu's attempts to portray the agreement as price-free, it is in effect a transaction that exacted from him a price in Palestinian currency (abandoning the annexation plan) and in the endorsement of the deal to supply F-35<sup>9</sup> and EA-18G Growler jets to the UAE.<sup>10</sup> Seeing that Netanyahu hid the F-35 aircraft deal from the Israeli public, the possibility cannot be ruled out that the deal carried additional costs that have yet to be revealed.

More importantly, no less than it is intended to sell the agreement with the UAE to the Israeli public, the real purpose of the "peace for peace" message is to remarket the occupation and dismantle the aspiration to a settlement with the Palestinians. When Netanyahu says "peace for peace," he is in effect saying that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be ended without Israel having to give up territory.

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<sup>7</sup> [Israel, UAE Reach Historic Peace Deal: 'We Can Make a Wonderful Future'](#), Lahav Harkov and Omri Nahmias, The Times of Israel, 14 August 2020

<sup>8</sup> [Netanyahu's Facebook page](#), 20 August 2020 (Hebrew)

<sup>9</sup> [Despite Netanyahu's Claims, Sale of F-35s to UAE Is Still on the US Agenda](#), Amos Harel, Haaretz, 19 August 2020

<sup>10</sup> [Netanyahu Privately Condoned US Plan To Sell Arms to UAE, Officials Say](#), Mark Mazzetti, Edward Wong and Michael LaForgia, The New York Times, 3 September 2020

Over the years, the Israeli public has become accustomed to the occupation and grown indifferent and blind toward its injustices, thus allowing its continuation and inuring us to regard military control over a civilian population as normal. We have all grown used to checkpoints, searches and checkups, videos of armed soldiers breaking into the homes of Palestinian families in the dead of night, of 19-year-olds making life-and-death decisions for men, women, children and the elderly. Nowadays, such sights hardly seem jarring or attract our attention; the occupation is the new normal. In this sense, the agreement between Israel and the UAE takes a moral erosion process that has gone on for 53 years, abruptly magnifies it and colossally exacerbates it.

Here is how Don Draper explains to his client the marketing ploy he has just devised for him: "Advertising is based on one thing: happiness. And you know what happiness is? Happiness is the smell of a new car... It's freedom from fear. It's a billboard on the side of the road that screams with reassurance that whatever you're doing is okay. You are okay."<sup>11</sup>

Each for his own reasons, Trump and Netanyahu teamed up to deceive the Israeli public regarding the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It started with "the deal of the century," which repackaged land theft as "peace" and the fragmented and unsustainable autonomy of the Palestinian Authority as a "Palestinian state." Later, when the appalling annexation of the territories collapsed royally, that "great plan for Israel" was ditched in favor of an agreement with the UAE, and now the normalization of existing relations is being described as "peace." The meaning is clear, Netanyahu suggests: with the Palestinians, too, an agreement can be reached without Israel having to pay a price.

The status quo remained unchanged, but was remarketed in order to give it legitimacy, normalcy and a semblance of reasonableness. The agreement with the UAE serves as a flashing neon billboard telling passersby that they are fine, that the inequality between Israelis and Palestinians is fine, that the 53-year continued violation of Palestinian human rights is fine, that whatever Israel does in order to continue to rule the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea - is fine, too. And if everything is fine, then there is no reason why we should not preserve the status quo forever. The occupation, for years described as a temporary necessity until Israel and the Palestinians reach a compromise, has now been rebranded as a normal situation that will persist, and that the Palestinians will eventually come to accept as a given and permanent reality. This is the "peace for peace" that Netanyahu is selling us: eternal occupation, eternal Israeli control, eternal Jewish supremacy in the region between the river and the sea.

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<sup>11</sup> [Script of pilot episode, Mad Men](#)

### 3. REAPING PROFITS FROM THE MOVE

#### A. Personal Political Interests

Immediately after Netanyahu's announcement about the "historic peace agreement," the mainstream media and social networks erupted with enthusiasm and joy. The move was received positively almost universally, and was praised by President Reuven Rivlin,<sup>12</sup> many in the left-wing camp in Israel, the international community,<sup>14</sup> Netanyahu's main political rival Benny Gantz,<sup>14</sup> and Trump's political rival Joe Biden.<sup>15</sup> Even the reaction of the right-wing settlers, whose interests were directly harmed by the cancellation of the annexation, was relatively moderate, and some of them even voiced their support for the move.<sup>16</sup> The only ones who voiced their opposition from the beginning were the Palestinians, but apart from them the agreements appeared to be embraced across the political spectrum.

The sweeping support for the move should come as no surprise. Official normalization with the UAE may benefit Israel on the political and diplomatic level, strengthen tourism, foreign and trade relations, mutual economic investments, etc. This is an almost unprecedented Israeli achievement, which opens yet another important "breach in the Arab ring of isolation around Israel,"<sup>17</sup> this time publicly, and may vastly contribute to the country's economy, tourism and the establishment of diplomatic relations with other Arab countries. Netanyahu is well aware that it is difficult to resist such an agreement, and that any opposition or reservations will easily be portrayed as left-wing "sourness" or as knee-jerked antagonism toward Netanyahu and his government.

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<sup>12</sup> Rivlin wrote on his Twitter page: "The agreement between Israel and the UAE is an important and strategic milestone for new opportunities in our region. I hope that this step will also lead to strengthening trust between us and the peoples of the region, and to a broad-based and stable understanding among us all," [Gantz: UAE Peace Deal Emphasizes Israel's Eternal Aspiration for Peace](#), Jerusalem Post Staff and Reuters, The Jerusalem Post, 13 August 2020

<sup>13</sup> UN special coordinator for the Middle East peace process Nickolay Mladenov welcomed the deal in a statement on his Twitter page: "It stops Israeli annexation plans, which the UN has consistently called for. I hope it will create opportunities for Israeli and Palestinian re-engagement. The UN will work with all for dialogue, peace and stability," [UN Chief, Europe, India Welcome Israel-UAE Deal, Suspended Annexation Plans](#), AFP and TOI Staff, 14 August 2020

<sup>14</sup> Gantz wrote on his Twitter page: "I am sure that this agreement will have many positive implications for the entire Middle East as well as for Israel's standing in the world and the region... I call on other Arab countries to advance ties with Israel with additional peace treaties," [Settlers Fume, Israeli Officials Laud UAE Peace Deal](#), Ariel Kahana, Daniel Siryoti and News Agencies, Israel Hayom, 13 August 2020

<sup>15</sup> [Biden Welcomes 'Historic' Israel-UAE Deal To Normalize Relations](#), AFP, 13 August 2020

<sup>16</sup> [Netanyahu 'Betrayed Our Trust': Settler Leaders Criticize UAE Deal Blocking Annexation](#), Hagar Shezaf and Noa Landau, Haaretz, 13 August 2020

<sup>17</sup> [Once Again, US Saves Netanyahu From Himself](#), Amos Harel, Haaretz, 16 August 2020

Netanyahu, under threat of three criminal indictments, the coronavirus pandemic, an economic crisis and growing demonstrations against him, was given a golden opportunity. With the help of a move framed as dovish and peace-seeking, he immediately lowered the flames of criticism against him concerning his failed performance and his decision, in the midst of an acute crisis, to take time to sort out personal tax issues, engage in a bitter war with the Attorney General and disseminate fabricated stories about the protesters. The agreement with the UAE allows Netanyahu to continue to push his main message in recent election campaigns: Netanyahu is in a "different league," a shrewd and skilled politician who enjoys close diplomatic ties with big superpowers and is irreplaceable.

## **B. Opportunity to Back Down on Annexation**

In January 2020, Donald Trump's White House launched "the deal of the century," which included a plan to unilaterally annex thirty percent of the West Bank. The deal, drafted by a team of the US President's advisers and experts, was formulated jointly with the Netanyahu government. The launching took place in the presence of Israel's two leading candidates for the premiership and without any Palestinian representation. Netanyahu immediately submitted it to the government and declared that the application of sovereignty would take effect on 1 July.

As noted earlier, the agreement with the UAE was reached in exchange for abandoning the unilateral annexation plan, a move that effectively buried it. That being the case, it could have been perceived as a display of weakness, a retreat from a plan that both Netanyahu and Trump had put at centerstage in the past year. Therefore, they needed to portray this retreat as being the most positive, beneficial and powerful move possible. In other words, if they were already backing down, they had better do it in one firm and confident move. Signing a "peace agreement," and an "historic"<sup>18</sup> one at that, was the only way out as they were abandoning one "diplomatic achievement" for another.

At this stage, it is hard to tell whether the two-phase move was planned in advance ("the deal of the century" first and Israel-UAE agreement second) or just happened to work out this way. The first option suggests that the annexation contained in "the deal of the century" was from the outset intended to serve as a diversionary ploy inserted in the debate only for the sake of the relief that would come upon its removal. If this is the case, then it can be affirmed that the purpose of Trump and Netanyahu's annexation plan was to put on the table a deal that would legitimize,

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<sup>18</sup> [IDF Radio's Twitter page](#), 13 August 2020: Halikud: "There is a lot of fake news in the media surrounding the historic peace agreement. Prime Minister Netanyahu is committed to sovereignty and the Land of Israel, and for the first time in this country's history brings peace for peace".

normalize and perpetuate the status quo of occupation and continued conflict, and that there might never have been an intention to officially annex more territory. The second possibility is that the annexation gradually lost its feasibility due to various political developments and stopped serving its leading stakeholders. If this is the case, then the agreement with the UAE served as the means that allowed Trump and Netanyahu to back down on annexation without it being framed as a failure or harming their status.

Either way, Netanyahu benefited: Even if in the end it did not materialize, "the deal of the century" set a new norm regarding US policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As for the second phase, making the agreement conditional on calling off the annexation did not exact a price from Netanyahu, but merely helped him to elegantly backtrack from something that was anyway unfeasible and had already contributed to strengthening his political power. All this while basking in the glory of spearheading a challenging diplomatic move that is hardly opposable.

# CHAPTER 2: THE PRICE

On the face of it, given that the agreement with the UAE did away with the annexation plan, one would have expected the plan's repercussions to disappear as well. However, since the strength of that annexation plan lies not only in its actual implementation but also in the normative debate it sparked, it would be unwise to assume that calling it off would automatically erase all the damage it has inflicted on the Palestinians. This damage is intertwined with the serious implications of the normalization of relations with the UAE and the manner in which it was portrayed in Israel. Together they have had far-reaching effects on the wellbeing of the Palestinian people and the chances of reaching an agreement with it.

## 1. NORMALIZATION OF THE OCCUPATION

### A. Punching a Hole in the Balloon of Arab Solidarity with the Palestinian Struggle

The reason why the UAE and Israel had not had official diplomatic relations so far is the occupation and its attendant harm to the Palestinians. The UAE could not normalize relations with Israel as long as the latter did not cease its control over the Occupied Territories and the Palestinian people. The conditionalization of the establishment of diplomatic relations on ending the occupation did affect reality, but primarily shaped the perception of the occupation as wrong. As long as the entire Arab world treated the occupier as a country with which official diplomatic relations could not be established, what followed was a clear and uncompromising conclusion about the occupation: an aberration that must stop immediately.

Among the Arab states, the customary and accepted position was that as long as Israel continued to occupy the Palestinians, there was no room to establish normal diplomatic relations with it.<sup>19</sup> In fact, as the occupation deepened and the balance of power between Israel and the Palestinian Authority became more biased in favor of Israel, this pressure lever by the Arab states on Israel became a more central component in the Palestinian hope for ending the occupation and founding a state.

Although the peace agreement with the UAE was signed in exchange for abandoning the annexation plan, and the UAE went to great lengths to emphasize its opposition to the annexation and the fact that it had set its cancellation as a condition of the agreement,<sup>20</sup> two points are noteworthy in this context: First, the agreement was signed after 1 July 2020, the date set for implementing the annexation, when it was

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<sup>19</sup> [It's Time To Talk About 'Netanyahu Doctrine': Diplomatic Circumvention of Palestinians Yields Historic Fruit](#), Ehud Yaari, N12, 14 August 2020 (Hebrew)

<sup>20</sup> [Israel, UAE Reach Historic Peace Deal: 'We Can Make a Wonderful Future'](#), Lahav Harkov and Omri Nahmias, The Times of Israel, 14 August 2020

clear that the move had already been shelved and was not going to materialize. The second point concerns the impact of the "ploy" attributed by many to the Netanyahu-Trump move, whereby the annexation plan had been largely intended to legitimize the occupation.<sup>21</sup>

The UAE Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said immediately after the announcement of the agreement that "the UAE has worked strenuously over the past months for this diplomatic achievement, which will bring stability to the region and support the peace process."<sup>22</sup> However, UAE President and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Muhammad Bin-Zayed did not join the Netanyahu-Trump move out of pure desire to protect the Palestinians, for had he wanted to he could have demanded their inclusion in the process, but rather out of personal interest. According to Prof. Eli Podeh, it is his desire to position himself as a central Middle Eastern and Arab actor.<sup>23</sup> Others attribute Bin-Zayed's decision to his close ties to Muhammad Dahlan, a sworn rival and possible successor of PA leader Mahmud Abbas.<sup>24</sup>

The circumstances created upon the introduction of the annexation plan earlier this year allowed the UAE to have its cake and eat it, too: on the one hand, continue to express solidarity with the Palestinians, and on the other, start profiting from open relations with Israel, the removal of the Israeli veto on the sale of US weapons to the UAE, and the advancement of personal interests. The bottom line, however, is that the agreement with the UAE created the first crack in the conditionalization of relations with Israel on an end to the occupation and in the stance held by the Arab countries whereby the occupation is an obstacle to proper diplomacy. Accordingly, it significantly shattered the unanimous Arab position that the occupation is an aberration that must end.<sup>25</sup>

This means that the serious and blatant violation of human rights that has been taking place for 53 years under the auspices of the occupation has been given renewed legitimacy, and by a major player in the Arab world at that. The Palestinians are increasingly losing allies willing to pay a price on behalf of their struggle, and keep running out of their last bargaining chips vis-a-vis the Israeli rule, as the deepening and perpetuation of the occupation and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict comes at the

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<sup>21</sup> [The Israel-UAE Deal May Boost Both Economies, But It's Also Another Netanyahu Ploy](#), Bernard Avishai, *The New Yorker*, 1 September 2020

<sup>22</sup> [Palestinians Slam 'Betrayal' by UAE in Deal With Israel: 'Reward of the Occupation's Crimes'](#), Noa Jackie Huri and Noa Landau, *Haaretz*, 13 August 2020

<sup>23</sup> [How the UAE and Saudi Arabia Now Hold Israel Hostage](#), Elie Podeh, *Mitvim Institute*, *Haaretz*, 26 August 2020

<sup>24</sup> ['Betrayal,' With a Personal Touch: Why the PA Is So Angry at the Israel-UAE Deal](#), Avi Issacharoff, *The Times of Israel*, 21 August 2020; [The Palestinians Are Angry Again](#), Ronit Marzan, *Haaretz*, 19 August 2020

<sup>25</sup> [Israel and the UAE: A Reality Check](#), Naomi Chazan, *The Times of Israel*, 17 August 2020

## B. Entrenchment and Perpetuation of Violation of Palestinian Human Rights

"So, Netanyahu may be right that peace can be made with Arab states over the heads of the Palestinians. But that is not what he was really trying to say. His subtext was that if we are able to spend a weekend watching camel races in the Dubai desert, then the occupation and apartheid cost us nothing; that if normal relations can be reached with our neighbors without a single Palestinian gaining freedom, then everything is fine and there is no reason or imperative to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli tangle. Except, that's exactly the way a criminal thinks. If my neighbors ignore my wife's screams when I beat her up, then I have no problem and I can go on beating her up. If I don't go to jail for stealing, then there is no reason I should stop stealing," Advocate Michael Sfard, an expert on international law and human rights, writes in an article that directly addresses the heavy price the Palestinians are paying for Trump and Netanyahu's political survival efforts.<sup>26</sup>

The Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, which marked its 53<sup>rd</sup> year last June, entails a widespread, blatant and continuous violation of Palestinian human rights. The Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories suffer displacement, deportation, expropriation, theft, violence and a sweeping denial of their freedoms, and after over five decades of occupation many of them were born into this reality and know of no other possibility.

The vast majority of the practices to control the Occupied Territories rely on a security pretext, to the effect that in order to ensure peace for the Israeli population, force must be used against the Palestinians and a rigid and invasive military presence must be demonstrated on a daily basis. Millions of Palestinians are subjected to inspections, detentions, arrests, searches, etc., in most cases involving people defined by the security forces as "uninvolved," meaning a civilian population that has nothing to do with terrorist activity. The Palestinians in the Occupied Territories know very well from personal experience that at any given moment soldiers may invade their homes to conduct random searches, and that one of the IDF's main goals in the Occupied Territories is to "demonstrate presence." Their daily routine is breached constantly, randomly and unexpectedly; their freedom of movement is frequently denied, and accordingly their livelihood options. Their property is regularly plundered or expropriated, and the system is built in such a way that even their ability to appeal to a court to safeguard their rights often depends on the generosity of the occupier, and is usually withheld.

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<sup>26</sup> [Even Burj Khalifa Won't Conceal the Apartheid](#), Michael Sfard, Haaretz, 17 August 2020 (Hebrew)

One of the main causes for the intensifying violation of Palestinian human rights in the Occupied Territories is the very presence of the settler population. The settlement enterprise in the West Bank has created an apartheid reality where two population groups live in the same geographical territory, but in many of the fields that regulate their lives, each is subject to a different legal system: Palestinians live under military law, while their settler neighbors answer to Israeli law, which applies to them personally although geographically they live in an area outside the State of Israel.

This separation policy is reflected, among other things, in the development of separate infrastructure (roads, power lines, water pipes, etc.), construction of the separation fence, land expropriation, suppression of Palestinian development (as evidenced by the dearth of building permits granted to Palestinians on the one hand, and the proliferation of deportation and demolition orders on the other),<sup>27</sup> and other legal actions. Thus, for example, the freedom of movement of Palestinians is often restricted due to the presence of settlers, under the guise of the need to protect the latter. The West Bank is full of roads to which Palestinian access is either forbidden or restricted. These roads are called "sterile routes" in military parlance, and their existence entails a serious violation of the rights of Palestinians, some of whom are forced to take huge detours, climb over fences or jump across roofs to get to their own homes.<sup>28</sup>

Up until now, the official position of Israeli governments in response to allegations of human rights violations under the occupation had been that they are working towards a mutually-agreed arrangement that guarantees the freedom and security of both sides, and would one day abolish the balance of power in the West Bank of Jewish supremacy versus Palestinian inferiority. The occupation, Israel argued, has an expiration date; it is an inevitable temporary situation that is progressing, albeit slowly and jerkily, toward an arrangement.

But declarations are one thing and reality another. Since the Oslo Accords, almost no diplomatic moves have been made to resolve the conflict and end the occupation. Moreover, and increasingly under Netanyahu's rule, Israel has been acting on the ground to further entrench its military presence in the West Bank, strengthen and expand settlements and try to undermine international opposition to this state of affairs.

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<sup>27</sup> For additional information, [Planning Policy in the West Bank](#), Btselem's website, 6 February 2019; [Netanyahu Revives Settlement Construction Plan That Critics Say Would Split West Bank](#), Hagar Sheizaf, Haaretz, 25 February 2020; [No Law Enforcement by Civil Administration in Israeli, Palestinian Localities in West Bank](#), Dotan Levi, Calcalist, 28 March 2016 (Hebrew)

<sup>28</sup> [Girl Tries to Get Back Home](#), Facebook page of Breaking the Silence, 28 August 2018

The normalization of relations with the UAE, which, as stated, did away with the conditionalization of normalization with Israel on ending the occupation, is part of Netanyahu's effort to weaken international opposition to the continued occupation of the territories. In this sense, Netanyahu can boast of an achievement. The Palestinians have lost an international pressure lever, and the price of occupation has become slightly lower, thus increasing the chances that what has been described as a temporary state of affairs will perpetuate itself and become eternal. This means that the grave violation of the rights of millions of Palestinians, which has so far been described as an inevitable situation that will persist until a diplomatic solution is reached, will continue for many years to come. In a statement issued in response to the announcement about the Israel-UAE agreement, Mahmud Abbas addressed this aspect, saying that what the UAE did was an act of "betrayal of Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Palestinian cause."<sup>29</sup>

If the normalization of relations with the UAE is a historic achievement as Netanyahu claims, then Israel could have reached it many years ago, as part of a political settlement with the Palestinians. However, normalization came only when the opportunity arose to do so without challenging the status quo of occupation. In late August, in a joint official statement with Jared Kushner and the US national security adviser, Netanyahu said that "if we had to wait for the Palestinians, we would have to wait forever."<sup>30</sup> After more than a decade of Netanyahu's rule, characterized by "conflict management" and attempts to evade any hint of territorial compromise in the territories, it is already clear that for him there is no impediment to continue like this forever. Recent moves, as well as the language used to describe them, confirmed it for good, tearing the mask off Israel's face and proving that what the Israeli leadership has in mind is continued rule of the entire area, and couldn't care less about the attendant price in blood and systematic violation of Palestinian human rights. From now on, the official Israeli approach to the conflict is unilateral progress at the expense of concessions, compromises, talks, contacts and negotiations, and no apologies.

In this respect, the "peace agreement" with the UAE is intended to come at the expense of a real peace agreement, or at least a diplomatic arrangement, between Israel and the Palestinians. Much like the annexation plan, the agreement with the UAE is another nail in the coffin of the roadmap, which had been the solution accepted by both sides, by the international community, and by Trump's predecessors. This formula also contravenes the Arab Peace Initiative, whereby peace with all Arab countries will be possible when the occupation ends.<sup>31</sup> The normalization of relations

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<sup>29</sup> [Palestinians Slam 'Betrayal' by UAE in Deal With Israel: 'Reward of the Occupation's Crimes'](#), Jackie Huri and Noa Landau, Haaretz, 13 August 2020

<sup>30</sup> [Netanyahu: Palestinians No Longer Have a Veto on Peace](#), Lahav Harkov, JPost.com, 30 August 2020

<sup>31</sup> [Netanyahu's 'Normalization' Policy Will Turn Israel Into an Arab State](#), Shaul Arieli, Haaretz, 27 August 2020; [Amos Yadlin's Twitter page](#), 15 August 2020

with the UAE shows that the lack of an agreement with the Palestinians no longer hinders relations between Israel and the Arab states, and that from now on it is possible to move forward without them.

Therefore, calling the normalization arrangement with the UAE a "peace agreement" only adds to it a cynical and cruel dimension. Not only does this sick situation (conflict, warfare, violence, control, injustice and profound denial of human rights) threaten to take hold and become eternal, but Netanyahu is spinning it as if the very same move that anchors and perpetuates this problematic situation is the one that is going to solve it. It is almost like saying that the toasting process not only neutralizes the carcinogenic effect of cigarettes, but also cures cancer.

### **C. US Seal of Approval**

Up until now, the United States had officially supported a two-state solution and opposed construction in the settlements. The "deal of the century" announced a change in US policy and altered this equation. It legitimized the settlement enterprise retroactively and called on the Palestinians to make do with a geographically fragmented and unsovereign "autonomy," which it dubbed a "state." This legitimization remained intact, even after the "deal of the century" was removed from the agenda.

The very existence of a seemingly serious plan authored by senior US administration officials, formally presented as a great solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and embraced by the Israeli leadership - has shaped the normative view with regard to Palestinian human rights. It entrenches, normalizes, and legitimizes the separation policy in the West Bank and its attendant widespread human rights violations.

The Trump presidency created a paradigm shift in US policy with regard to the apartheid reality existing in the territories and gave it a stamp of approval. Trump replaced the aspiration to an agreed-upon solution with forceful and unilateral measures; the future Palestinian state with a so-called "state-minus" bearing hollow characteristics of autonomy; and the Palestinians' aspiration to human and national rights with eternal inferiority versus the Jewish population.

## **2. NORMALIZATION OF CREEPING ANNEXATION**

Although the plans for a formal annexation have been dropped, anyone who is familiar with the reality in the Occupied Territories knows that the status quo is an illusion, and that a de-facto creeping annexation is taking place on the ground and does not stop for a moment. In fact, now that an official and far-reaching annexation was guaranteed, even if it is currently off the table, there is every reason to assume that the creeping annexation will only intensify, both because of the settlers' desire to continue to create facts on the ground and of the US legitimization of the annexation to date. It is hard to ignore the ideological connection between the reality of the occupation under which attempts have been made for years to expel Palestinian communities from Area C in order to Judaize the land, and the annexation plans that were supposed to turn Area C into Israeli territory and would have involved the evacuation of these very same communities.

The United States put the annexation of the territories on the agenda, an act that until recently had been perceived as extreme and far-reaching but now enjoys US legitimacy. The very fact that a strong superpower like the United States supports and spearheads annexation renders the idea of regular land theft as legitimate and reasonable and provides tailwind and a stamp of approval to supporters of annexation in Israel. Although at this point the threat of a legislated annexation has been removed, the impact of its normalization and legitimization will accompany us for years to come.

In the same breath, now that the mask has been removed and Israel has fully acknowledged its desire to continue to rule over the entire territory - either by embracing "the deal of the century," normalizing relations with the UAE, or declaring its continued desire for annexation - small acts of annexation will no longer appear particularly dramatic. In other words, Jewish takeover of land will henceforth be compatible with the stated policy of the Israeli leadership. Official Israel no longer declares that it is striving to end the conflict by way of a diplomatic settlement and has chosen a new path.

In addition, one must take into account the "ploy effect." Annexing a few square kilometers here and there will appear totally negligible when compared to the plan that would have legislated the annexation of all of Area C and the settlement blocs. This will allow annexation supporters to frame the cancellation of the plan as an Israeli "concession" that calls for compensation in the form of turning a blind eye to one-off cases of land seizures.

Hints of what lies ahead can be seen in recent events around Area E1 connecting Jerusalem to the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim. Israeli construction in E1, which includes efforts to expel Palestinian communities that have lived there for decades, is neither an exception nor anything new, and has been taking place as part of the creeping annexation that Israel has been promoting for years. Israeli construction in this area means dividing the West Bank into two separate parts (Ramallah-northern West Bank and Bethlehem-southern West Bank) and encircling East Jerusalem in such a way as to cut it off from the rest of the West Bank, thus dooming the feasibility of a viable future Palestinian state. To date, the involvement of the international community has succeeded in halting Jewish construction in the region and the implications stemming from it. Although "the deal of the century" and the annexation plans triggered widespread international criticism precisely because of these steps, as of August 2020, "two master plans (E1 South and E1 East) for the establishment of a new settlement in E1 between Ma'ale Adumim and East Jerusalem are nearing final approval."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> [Quiet, Annexation Underway](#), Aviv Tatarsky, Haaretz, 12 August 2020 (Hebrew)

## CONCLUSION

There are several aspects to Netanyahu's attempt to deceive the public with regard to the normalization of relations with the UAE. First, his effort to market the move as a peace agreement when in fact it is largely the formalization of existing relations with a country with which Israel has no conflict whatsoever. Second, the portrayal of the move as one that does not entail any price ("peace for peace") when in fact it was achieved in exchange for the redrawing of the annexation plan and the approval of the F-35 jet deal. Third, the agreement allowed Netanyahu to back down on the planned annexation, which in any case had ceased to yield fruit, without being perceived as weak or as a loser reneging on a move he had championed until recently, but quite the contrary: being depicted as an accomplished leader and statesman despite criminal charges and widespread public criticism.

But Netanyahu's biggest deception lies in hiding the Palestinian price attached to the normalized relations. The move may have buried the plan to formally annex one third of the West Bank, but at the same time it contributed greatly to the entrenchment and perpetuation of the occupation and the blatant daily human rights violations that take place under its auspices. The agreement with the UAE created the first crack in the solidarity of Arab states with the Palestinians, under which the establishment of normal diplomatic relations had so far been conditional on ending the occupation. In this sense, it legitimizes and normalizes the occupation and the creeping annexation that has been taking place for years, and conveys the message that Israeli control over the Palestinians is no longer an obstacle in Israel's path to prosperity.

The normalization of relations with the UAE did indeed come in response to "the deal of the century" and was made contingent on abandoning the annexation plan that was at its core, but these two moves should be seen as inseparable. Both normalize violence, theft and inequality, while completely excluding the Palestinians from the debate; both provide a US seal of approval to the entrenchment of Jewish supremacy and continued Israeli control over the entire territory; both aggravate the violation of Palestinian human rights; both destroy heretofore accepted paradigms and create a new starting point for discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that works to the detriment of the Palestinians; and both tear the mask off Israel's face, revealing that Israel's control of the Occupied Territories is not an inevitable temporary situation but a choice stemming from the desire to continue to rule over the entire area forever.

Both with regard to "the deal of the century" and the normalization of relations with the UAE, Netanyahu uses the laundered term "peace agreement" to describe a move that has nothing to do with peace, and that in fact distances Israel from a mutually agreed-upon diplomatic solution with the only people with whom it is critical and imperative to

make peace: the Palestinians. The difference is that if "the deal of the century" was a stick (threat of annexation), then the agreement with the UAE is a carrot (the promise of normalization), but both ultimately are a distraction that mainly serves Netanyahu and Trump and severely hurts millions of people.

The normalization of relations with the UAE is yet another instance where Netanyahu's deception serves him and his partners, but its price is paid first and foremost by the Palestinians as well as by the Israeli public that has been suffering a bloody conflict and is seduced by the promise of a "peace" wrapped in glossy packaging. What is becoming clear beyond the shadow of a doubt is that in order to entrench his power and ensure his continued rule, Netanyahu does not hesitate to deceive the public and sell it lies that disguise not only his true intentions, but also the serious consequences of his actions.



In May 2020, we launched **Zulat for Equality and Human Rights**, a unique institute that combines research and analysis with activism via social media networks and conventional media, and acts as a bridge between the political arena and civil society. Zulat's studies portray the political and public reality, but our work only begins there. As an activist think tank, we fight back by working to set an alternative agenda, change the public discourse, and advance policy and legislation to uphold democracy and human rights. We represent a broad perspective on human rights, that looks at universal rights, civil rights - private as well as collective, and social rights – as a whole. We believe all different types of rights depend and relay on one another.

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