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## The peace deal that passeth all understanding ...

*'It was clear from the start that the application of sovereignty [i.e. annexation] would be done only with agreement from the United States. Otherwise, I would have already done it a while ago.'* (Benjamin Netanyahu: 11.08.2020)



Annexation by Israel of 30% of the Occupied West Bank is not off the table. It's not even suspended - the cards are just being played in a different order. As Netanyahu said on the 17th August, four days after the announcement of the 'normalisation deal' with the UAE:

'For three years, I worked toward sovereignty. I inserted it into President Trump's peace plan. ... According to the American plan, Israel will receive 30% of Judea and Samaria [the West Bank] – 10 times more than any other plan – without uprooting communities [illegal settlements] and retaining territory vital to Israel's security. ... [the American plan] hasn't changed. I made it happen.'

Annexation has always been a key element of the 'deal of the century', and the UAE and Bahrain have been supporters of the deal from the very beginning. Bahrain hosted the 'donor conference', the so-called 'Peace to Prosperity' workshop, in June 2019. And, speaking at that conference, the UAE Minister of State for Financial Affairs, Obaid al-Tajer, expressed his support: 'We should give this initiative a chance.'

In January of this year, the UAE ambassador to the US, Yousef Al Otaiba, angered Palestinians when he attended the White House ceremony at which 'the deal of the century' was unveiled. In a statement released at the time he said:

*The United Arab Emirates appreciates continued US efforts to reach a Palestine-Israel peace agreement. This plan is a serious initiative that addresses many issues raised over the years.*

*The only way to guarantee a lasting solution is to reach an agreement between all concerned parties. The UAE believes that Palestinians and Israelis can achieve lasting peace and genuine coexistence with the support of the international community. The plan announced today offers an important starting point for a return to negotiations within a US-led international framework.*

This, despite the fact that the Palestinian leadership had made it clear that they would have nothing to do with Trump's plan.

Israel has been conducting secret diplomatic contacts with the United Arab Emirates for more than 20 years. For many years the Israeli Foreign Ministry operated a mission there under cover, as part of the UN International Renewable Energy Agency. Then, in November 2015, it announced that it would open a diplomatic office in the UAE, the first time in more than a decade that Israel had had an official presence in the Persian Gulf. It's now preparing to upgrade its mission in Abu Dhabi to an official embassy.

In addition to facilitating Mossad activities in the area, the Foreign Ministry has been very active in the Persian Gulf, and has maintained contact with government officials, businesses and other, influential figures. Over the past several years, there has been a spike in the number of visits by official Israeli delegations to the Gulf. While four delegations visited the UAE between 2016 and 2018, fifteen delegations made such trips in 2019 alone. These figures don't include business people who travelled independently.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu flew to the United Arab Emirates in 2018 for a secret meeting with the crown prince of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. The meeting was also attended by Mossad head, Yossi Cohen, who facilitated the visit. The Likud leader has always maintained that he could force Arab countries to reverse the 'land for peace' formula – which has been the bedrock of any two-state solution – by normalising ties with Arab autocrats, and without giving an inch of occupied land back to the Palestinians. Instead of 'land for peace' the current deal offers 'peace for peace'.

The American Jewish Committee (AJC), founded in 1906, and one of the oldest and most hawkish pro-Israeli lobby groups in the US, has announced that it is opening an office in the Gulf kingdom. Relations between the AJC and the UAE have been blossoming over the years with the pro-Israel lobby group's delegation visiting the UAE at least once a year for the past two decades, holding meetings and consultations with Emirati and US officials. The UAE's Ambassador to the UN, Lana Nusseibeh, and its Foreign Minister, Anwar Gargash, are said to be among officials from the Gulf state who have spoken at AJC events.

The UAE views American pro-Israeli lobby groups as a conduit to the White House, and UAE officials used the AJC's platforms to present their position on cooperation with Israel. According to an article in the Jerusalem Post, 'A key reason that Arab states strive for ties with Israel is their desire to benefit from Israel's influence with the US administration.'

'Security considerations' have been cited as one of the major reasons for the UAE breaking ranks with its Arab neighbours. Alongside its role in the ongoing Yemen tragedy, the UAE has aligned itself with Israel and Saudi Arabia in attempts to limit the influence of Iran in the region. On the 7th September, Secretary of State Pompeo said, 'The UAE and Israel both recognise Iran as this great threat, so they have now found a way to build out a relationship which can build out a coalition to ultimately make sure that this threat never reaches American shores or harms anyone in the Middle East.'

In return for normalising diplomatic relations with Israel, the UAE is expecting to acquire an unspecified number of F-35 stealth fighters, plus armed drones and a shipment of EA-18G Growler jets, electronic warfare planes that can jam enemy air defences. An Emirati military delegation reportedly visited Israel to

see its F-35s in operation. This has caused consternation among some members of Netanyahu's Likud party, including Tzachi Hanegbi, who is on record as saying that Israel is opposed to the sale of 'even one screw' of the F-35 to the UAE.

Along with the \$3.8 billion of US military aid Israel receives annually, it expects to maintain its 'qualitative military advantage' over its regional neighbours. So far, Israel's has been the only military in the region to operate the \$100-million per unit F-35 warplanes, having received its first delivery in December 2016 after the Obama administration agreed to the sale.

Slippery and duplicitous as ever, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu privately approved America's sale of F-35 fighter jets to the UAE, despite coming out against the deal publicly. The New York Times has cited officials familiar with the negotiations as saying that Netanyahu chose not to try to block the deal during talks to establish diplomatic ties with the UAE.

In a statement, Netanyahu's office said the agreement did not include 'any approval by Israel on any arms deal between the United States and the United Arab Emirates. .... The peace agreement with the United Arab Emirates does not include any clause in this regard, and the United States made it clear to Israel that it will always ensure that Israel gets the qualitative advantage.'

The Israeli 'security establishment' is now discussing the compensation package that Israel will demand, including the possibility of bringing forward the date for the supply of advanced American weapons systems to Israel by one year.

For its part, the USA is sanguine about the idea of more military hardware finding its way into the hands of a state that is implicated in war crimes in Yemen, and which subjects its own citizens, as well as foreign nationals, 'to arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and enforced disappearance'. They prefer to listen to the words of Benjamin Netanyahu who has described the UAE as 'a democracy and, along with Israel, one of the most advanced societies in the world.' As a US spokesperson said,

'With respect to the F-35 or any military hardware or infrastructure, I keep reminding people that it is important to know that the UAE and US's military and security relationship is robust and has been there for decades. Since the Gulf War, the United States had sold military aircraft and hardware, F-16s, and others to the UAE.'

#### **Some further reading:**

['Quiet Annexation' amid UAE-Israeli normalization](#)

[For Israel, 'Peace' has always meant avoiding Palestinian statehood](#)

[The U.A.E.-Israel flight Is nothing to celebrate](#)

[Palestinians are a side note in the UAE-Israeli political charade](#)

[Palestinians sidelined in Saudi-Emirati rapprochement with Israel](#)