**Netanyahu’s ‘Normalization’ Policy Will Turn Israel Into an Arab State**

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The normalization agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates – like Benjamin Netanyahu’s 2009 Bar-Ilan speech and President Donald Trump’s peace vision earlier this year – is nothing but the same dame in different clothes when it comes to the prime minister’s Palestinian policy.

Netanyahu uses accepted and recognizable concepts from previous diplomatic moves with the Palestinians and Arab nations, but intends the opposite of what the international community and previous Israeli leaders sought to achieve. His goal is not to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with the help of Arab states, but to decide the outcome on the basis of their support and setting impossible terms for the Palestinians, or their continued indifference to the existing situation.

The short-term victory of Netanyahu’s policy will ultimately result in defeat for the Zionist movement in the long term.

Any diplomatic entity involved in an unresolvable conflict with another entity has the option of involving a third party to try to break the “stalemate.” This strategy can be utilized with the aim of achieving two opposing goals: Mobilizing the third party to force the hand of the other side in the conflict; or mobilizing the third party to increase the “basket of benefits” and divide it up among all parties involved in reaching a compromise.

History is full of examples of the first option, so I’ll suffice with just three from our region.

The first would be how Arab states joined the effort to decide the Jewish-Arab conflict in the Independence War and afterward.

The second would be the strategic concept adopted by David Ben-Gurion at the end of the 1950s to achieve special ties and alliances at every possible level – strategic, intelligence, economic – with countries or groups that opposed the Arab policy led by then-Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. This concept gave rise to the so-called Periphery Alliance of Turkey, Iran, Ethiopia, the Kurds and the Christians in Lebanon.

The third example – one that influenced then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin’s choice of diplomacy with the Palestinians in 1993 – was the understanding that such a process was the quid pro quo Israel would need to give Sunni Arab nations in order to enjoy any strategic alliance with them, for the sake of curbing an increasingly strong Iran and its Shi’ite satellites.

There are many examples of the second option, too, but I’d like to focus on the Israeli-Arab-Palestinian conflict from the start of the diplomatic process with the Arab world, in 1974.

Israel’s peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan are bilateral, but achieving them required U.S. involvement. For Egypt, U.S. military aid and the return of the Sinai Peninsula was a generous enough quid pro quo to suffice with an autonomy agreement for the Palestinians and demilitarization of Sinai. The same was true of Israel. The civilian and military aid the Americans provided (which has thus far totaled about $200 billion) and deployment of a multinational observer force while removing Egypt from the conflict was an appropriate exchange for Israel’s full withdrawal from Sinai.

It was a similar story with Jordan. U.S. civilian aid and an Israel Defense Forces “umbrella” against external threats to Jordan, the supply of water from Israel and granting special status for the Temple Mount, plus economic promises for the future, worked their magic and led the Jordanians to sign a peace treaty.

The situation between Israel and the Palestinians is more complex. It took both sides and the United States more than a decade (1993-2007) to understand that they had to expand the boundaries of the system. Then-Prime Minister Ehud Barak’s arrogance that he’d “seal it all within two hours in the same room with [Palestinian Authority President Yasser] Arafat” at Camp David in 2000 gradually led to increased cooperation with others.

First, Israel wanted gestures from Arab countries that didn’t require any actual investment – mainly pushing the Palestinians to agree to concessions Israel was demanding on various issues (security, borders, refugees and Jerusalem) – in exchange for U.S. aid. Egypt’s readiness did not require any investment on its part. However, Israeli ideas such as three-way territorial swaps with Egypt and Palestine were rejected outright.

Second, there were European and other countries whom Israel asked for money to support an agreement, specifically with regard to compensating refugees and building a Palestinian economy. That was how the Quartet (the United Nations, Russia, the United States and European Union) was born. The Americans and other Quartet members were at the Annapolis talks in 2007, in addition to representatives of the Arab League. These included Egypt and Jordan, as well as countries without diplomatic ties with Israel such as Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Sudan, Lebanon and even Syria.

The Netanyahu method

Netanyahu preferred a different approach. He declared that he would implement another option: Expanding the boundaries of the system for the sake of both sides and resolving the conflict, but in effect only operating according to the first option – recruiting players to force the Palestinians’ hand by dictating terms.

For years, Netanyahu blocked attempts to resolve the conflict via the second option. He rejected the Arab League’s Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 and declared arrogantly in June 2016 that “if the Arab nations grasp the fact that they need to revise the Arab League proposal according to the changes Israel demands, then we can talk.”

He opposed four French initiatives, including setting up an international support group to accompany negotiations with the Palestinians and convening an international conference by the end of 2016. He objected to cooperating with the Quartet to prepare a report on the diplomatic stalemate.

He ignored the EU’s proposal in December 2013 to upgrade its relations with both the Israelis and Palestinians if they signed a peace agreement. He demanded that the Obama administration preserve the status quo. For example, he opposed Gen. John Allen’s security plan (Allen had been working as an emissary of then-Secretary of State John Kerry in 2014). Netanyahu also openly expressed concern that President Barack Obama might present a peace plan toward the end of his term in office.

Kerry, meanwhile, was recorded as saying in Dubai sometime in 2017 that Israel had “leaders who don’t want to make peace” and that “the majority of the cabinet in the current Israeli government has publicly declared they are not ever for a Palestinian state.”

Netanyahu was waiting for his chance, which came in 2016 in the form of Donald Trump. This granted him the opportunity to advance his old plan to give the Palestinians limited cultural autonomy in the West Bank – which he called a “state” – and to get the U.S. president to propose a plan in which he would effectively dictate unconditional surrender terms to the Palestinians.

Trump’s “peace vision” joined the Bar-Ilan speech, about which Netanyahu’s father, Benzion Netanyahu, said on Channel 2 a month later: “Benjamin doesn’t support a Palestinian state, only on terms that the Arabs will never accept. I heard him say this.”

The peace vision, like the Bar-Ilan speech, is full of concepts that characterized the negotiations before Netanyahu’s return as prime minister in 2009. From “Palestinian state” through “Palestinian contiguity,” to “Palestinian capital in Jerusalem.” But in reality, an examination of the details in the vision’s proposals shows that none fulfill any of those promises.

Netanyahu presents to Arab countries, with the help of the Americans and the common Iranian threat, the need to reconsider: Whether to adhere to the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which rests on the legitimacy of international decisions and parameters that guided the Annapolis talks, or to distinguish between the normalization process and the diplomatic controversy with Israel, in accordance with Netanyahu’s aspirations.

In other words, to enjoy U.S. investment and military aid in exchange for exerting pressure on the Palestinians to accept Israel’s positions, or at least not oppose them. Netanyahu is interested in Arab countries knowingly adopting the policy of Europe and other countries: recognizing Israel, full normalization in parallel with denial of the occupation and supporting a two-state solution – but without advancing any plans to carry that out, and without the imposition of sanctions for their non-advancement.

Those who enthuse over Netanyahu’s policy should heed what Ze’ev Jabotinsky wrote in his 1923 essay “The Iron Wall”:

“A plan that seems to attract many Zionists goes like this: If it is impossible to get an endorsement of Zionism by Palestine’s Arabs, then it must be obtained from the Arabs of Syria, Aram-Naharaim [Iraq], Hejaz [Saudi Arabia] and perhaps of Egypt.” He added that “even if this were possible, it would not change the basic situation. It would not change the attitude of the Arabs in the Land of Israel toward us.”

Back to the current reality: The Palestinians have already recognized Israel within its 1967 borders, in the Oslo Accords. Arab recognition of Israel beyond the 1967 borders will not change their position.

It’s difficult to know whether other Arab countries will follow in the footsteps of the UAE and accept Netanyahu’s policy, especially as Egypt’s President Abdel-Fattah al-Sissi and Jordan’s King Abdullah were burned back in 2016 when they tried to help him establish a government with then-Labor Party leader Isaac Herzog that would support the diplomatic process – an attempt that ended with hard-liner Avigdor Lieberman joining the government.

If they do so, then the “success” of Netanyahu’s policy will greatly enhance the chances of moving toward a single-state solution, with an interim stop of a long apartheid regime.

The Palestinians have already responded to the Trump vision by saying that they don’t intend to raise the white flag and accept the initiative. The loss of all hope for a two-state solution will turn the Palestinian national struggle into a civil rights struggle, which may at some stage be accompanied by violence and terrorism. The “fruits of normalization” in the short term – from military cooperation to a concert by Omer Adam – will in the long term transform into the end of the Zionist dream and the establishment of an Arab state on its ruins.