

Colonial Thuggery and Bias Are Alive and Well in Palestine

Two Important Cases Witnessed in September 2025



By Rami G. Khouri

Two significant developments that took place in September this year should remind us that in the Israeli-American assault on Gaza and Palestine we are witnessing a reformulated version of the European colonialism that has plagued the Middle East and much of the Global South for the last four centuries: Western states' recognition of Palestine and the September 29 announcement of the Gaza "peace plan" by President Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu. While they both contain some positive elements, they are overwhelmingly defined by colonial thuggery, the dynamics that have defined almost every aspect of Zionist-Israeli-Western policies on Palestine over the past century.

In principle, it is a good thing for states to recognize Palestine, as over 147 states (out of the world's 193) had done by the past summer, most of them from the Global South. While the September announcements of recognizing Palestine – made by Great Britain, France, Canada, Australia, and a few others – are mostly symbolic moves, they nevertheless carry some legal implications that one day might prove useful for Palestine's quest for self-determination and actual statehood. Under the current global conditions, however, legal attributes and rights have turned out to be mostly meaningless. The Zionist-Israeli-American assault on the global rule of law, adopted post-WWII, has reactivated the colonial-era rule that "might is right."

Colonialism's basic operating system comprises three main dimensions that over recent centuries manifested in various manners across the world. Today, all of them are applied simultaneously in Zionist-Israeli-US policies: First, White/Western people, societies, and states across the Global North still hold the assumption that they intrinsically possess greater human capabilities and more righteous values, and therefore enjoy greater rights, than the darker people of the Global South. Second, Western colonial powers assume that they have the total freedom to act anywhere across the globe, at any time, and in any manner they deem necessary to increase their wealth, security, and power. This includes the right to use massive military force, impose systems of slavery and subjugation, and reorganize the territories, economies, and demographics of societies that they have colonized and continue to exploit in the South. Third, the colonized people of the South are considered invisible, possessing no rights, no human agency,

Colonial exploitation was officially repudiated in the 1960 UN Resolution on Granting Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, yet the perpetuation and reemergence of colonialism's main dimensions have become glaringly obvious in the context of the world's policies applied in "dealing" with the "conflict" in Gaza: the assumed superiority of Western peoples and countries and their subsequent "right" to impose conditions on peoples of color that remain invisible and largely absent in decision-making regarding their future.

British colonization of Palestine.



and no voice; they therefore can be ignored while the colonizers go about reorganizing and plundering their lands and resources.

All three of these dynamics were evident in the suffering that Palestinians endured between circa 1910 and 1960 under the assault of the Zionists-UK forces. Since the 1960s, they have been perpetuated under the ongoing assault by Israel and the United States that have for the most part acted in accord. The current genocide in Gaza is merely the most dramatic and vicious stage of this colonial assault on the Palestinians that started with the Balfour Declaration in 1917, when the UK government approved the Zionist plan to create a Jewish "home" and state in Palestine at a time when 93 percent of the population comprised Indigenous Palestinian Arabs – and the United Kingdom did not yet control the land in question. This combination of Zionist audacity and racism with British imperial arrogance and violence launched the harsh century of Palestinian suffering that continues to this day.

It seems evident now, why majorities of people across the South and large numbers of younger people across the Global North are mobilizing for Palestinian justice and calling for equal rights for Israelis and Palestinians. They do so because the savagery and continuity in the abuse of Palestinians by Israel and Western powers has exposed the continuing nature of the global colonial enterprise that most of the world had assumed had ended during the global decolonization period in the mid-twentieth century. It has become clear that Israel, the United States, the United Kingdom, and a few other Western countries have not only actively participated in the genocide against Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere, these countries also worked together to perpetuate the colonial negation of the Palestinian people's rights, humanity, voice, and agency – which has extended beyond the land of Palestine and into the Western democracies of the North.

In the United States, Britain, Germany, Canada, Australia, France, and other lands, formal official efforts have been made, driven by Zionist-Israeli initiatives, to make the Palestinians an invisible colonized people. If voices for Palestinian justice across the North could not be silenced, the next option was to criminalize them. The colonial methods that for centuries had treated the Indigenous peoples of the South as invisible and dispensable beings were now being used in the democratic North: Peaceful activists and advocates for Palestine justice lost their jobs, were denied public speaking and gathering opportunities, and accused of antisemitism, terrorism, and hate crimes. Some countries, particularly Germany, the United States, and Britain, have arrested peaceful protestors and taken them to court over their expression of support for the rights of the Palestinians to statehood and their opposition to the war crimes Israel is committing.

British army in Palestine.



When this oppression became clear in the months and years after October 2023, when the extent and savagery of the US-enabled genocide against Palestine became known, most of the world recognized that the brutality in Gaza and the West Bank revived images of the colonial atrocities and massacres that the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, and a few others had perpetrated across the Global South during the previous four centuries. The world saw colonial savagery being applied today in Palestine – and it instantly recognized the long-standing resistance of the Palestinian people as the globe's last major anti-colonial struggle.

Like in all anti-colonial struggles, the weaker Indigenous people of the South suffered disproportionate deaths, injury, and destruction in the face of the war machines and killer mindsets of the Northern colonialists. Yet the battle for justice and national rights in Palestine has persisted – in every dimension of life, including street demonstrations, university sit-ins and encampments, peaceful societal disruptions, at sports and cultural events, in court cases, throughout social media, in all available international organizations and global courts such as the ICC and ICJ, and elsewhere.

This realization culminated at one level last month in the half dozen recognitions of the State of Palestine by Western powers who had previously hesitated to call the destruction of Gaza a genocide, even when it had been denoted as such by most international human rights groups and genocide scholars. This late recognition of Palestine's statehood seems motivated largely by these Western states' desire to assuage their own guilt over not having done anything to stop the genocide since October 2023 – let alone not having done anything to stop the colonization of the occupied Palestinian lands since 1967. If these countries were serious about Palestinian statehood, they should not only have recognized Palestine decades ago, they should also follow up their words with concrete action to bring about a real change for Palestinians.

The symbolism of the United Kingdom, the predominant pre-WWII imperial power, handing off the baton of colonial control in Palestine to the United States after WWII is an important sign of colonialism's continuous abuse of Palestine and other Arab lands over the past century.

In reality, these recent recognitions do not generate any significant tangible and positive impact. They could even be a negative force in the sense that they form one element in the rejuvenated but disguised neocolonialism that these Western powers are perpetrating. While it appears a positive development to recognize the Palestinian state, it might just serve to cover up the fact that nothing is done about the atrocities Israel has been committing in Palestine with the tacit approval, quiet support, or active



Colonial forces in Syria.

complicity of the United States and some Western powers, not only during this genocide but also over the last 50 years – and not only in Palestine but all over the Middle East.

The Palestinian right to self-determination and an independent state is deeply anchored in dozens of UN resolutions, many of which these countries voted for. So what we need now is serious action by Western powers to show that they genuinely mean what they say. When they say that the Palestinians should have a state, it follows that Israeli Zionism should be contained. Apartheid, occupation, ethnic cleansing, colonization, mass murder, incarceration, and genocidal policies must be stopped. Indeed, states that support Palestinian statehood could do many things to force that to happen. They could end Israeli colonial control through measures that include embargoes and sanctions, they could send protection forces, suspend Israel's UN membership, or do the kinds of things that many in the West did against apartheid South Africa.

Yet despite Britain's recognition of a Palestinian state, the group Palestine Action has been criminalized as terrorism for actively engaging to disrupt the British arms industry that is supplying weapons and ammunition to Israel, as has any peaceful expression of support for this group. So, a juxtaposition of Britain's policies against its statement that the Palestinians should have a state suggests that this recognition is a neither serious nor sincere gesture by the concerned political leaders. The situation is similar in France and Belgium, which have recognized a Palestinian state yet crack down heavily on popular expressions of support. We should call these governments out on this contradiction, and push them to go well beyond the statement of recognition with practical action to show that they are serious. Countries such as Spain and Ireland are leading among those who are willing to support their words with action, letting Israel know that they are serious in their demands for an end to the genocide and to the violation of the Palestinian right to self-determination and statehood.

The ugly reality is that the Western world has over the last century of the conflict between Zionism and the Indigenous Palestinian population supported in practice what the Israelis have done, partly prompted by guilt over the Nazi Holocaust and genocide, partly for other political and electoral reasons, and largely, in my assessment, because these countries have remained colonial countries at heart. They do not believe that the Indigenous people of Palestine, or of many other parts of the world, have the same rights as the White colonial people of the North. Deep in their political genes, these countries (many if not most of which have a colonial past) stand in practice with Israel and Zionism, the last major and active settler-colonial enterprise in the world; these countries have recognized Palestinian rights only through words to date.

Some Western governments' recognition of Palestinian statehood includes a clear and explicit patronizing sentiment: the UK that said that it would recognize Palestine only if Israel does not stop the genocide, whereas France recognizes only a demilitarized Palestinian state that would not have any self-defense ability. Such colonial conditioning is clear: A Palestinian state is recognized not because the Palestinians have a right to it but only within conditions that serve these governments' political and electoral interests. They do not grant Israelis and Palestinians equal rights, whether by constitutionalism, modern liberal political values, UN decisions, or other means.

These equal rights need to be implemented simultaneously, not sequentially. For the past 75 years, the process has been that Palestinians and Arabs may be granted their rights only if they comply with Israel's demands first. This is another form of colonialism. We are possibly at a very important moment in modern world history: Will we clarify that colonialism has ended once and for all? Exactly what do "Western liberal democracies" really stand for? Will the deeply engrained Western colonial heritage simply be garnished with new public relations gimmickry that allows Western politicians to avoid being voted out of office by their citizenries while they pretend that they are doing something concrete for Palestinians after a century of ignoring or dehumanizing them?

The recognition of Palestine without further action to improve conditions for Palestinians on the ground remains a largely hollow, if dramatic and media-genic gesture.

The most significant new global development in this context is that most people in most Western countries want an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and are beginning to exert some pressure on their governments to end the Israeli genocide. Yet most governments do not follow these sentiments of their own citizens, which is why hundreds of thousands who are seeking Palestinian justice are taking to the streets all over the world, including in the West.

Sadly, at this critical junction, we just witnessed the US president and the Israeli prime minister announce a so-called "peace plan" for Gaza that, as they claim, aims at ending the genocide and bringing long-term peace to the region. But a closer look at the 20-point US proposal suggests that it is in fact a continuation of the colonial ways, merely in more sophisticated disguises. The total absence of Palestinians in shaping the proposal is one of its main problems, which falls in line with the colonial rule that denies agency to Indigenous people in the South while the White northern colonialists set the rules. If the Palestinians do not accept the proposal, the US threatens to actively support a continuation of the Israeli genocide. The proposal treats the Palestinians like truant adolescents who have to be watched over by adults who help them "de-radicalize" so they can develop their

society. All focus regarding security is the security of Israel, with White Western adult supervision and armed forces from abroad in Palestine, mainly to make sure that no new resistance arises to Zionist-Israel barbarism. The United States and colonial sidekicks such as Tony Blair will sit at the top of the governance supervision system, because in colonial rules the locals cannot run their own societies. The proposal also says nothing about Israeli reparations for the massive destruction it has caused over the last two years (or the years preceding this most recent war). Palestinian self-determination and statehood are barely mentioned, and only like far-off wonderland mirages to which people can aspire in their dreams, or a Disney movie.

A small but telling point from the Trump-Netanyahu press conference on Monday was their repeated reference to the "Abrahamic" accords, which Trump called "Abrahamic" and Netanyahu, following the Hebrew pronunciation, called "Avrahamic." Nowhere in the proposal or in their colonial psyches did they consider using a linguistic reference that reflects the Arabic-speaking and Islamic pronunciation of the "Prophet Ibrahim." For in their minds, the Palestinians and their many Arab-Islamic supporters do not count for much; they are merely the recipients of Western military assaults and political dictates. In the colonial world, only the psychological and linguistic frames of the ., northern, settler-colonial armies applies.

I could go on and on about every point in the proposal, but hundreds of my colleagues around the world are doing that this week. I will only add that this US-Israeli proposal, with its associated threats of more American-Israeli savagery in Palestine, should be a case study for young students around the world who wish to understand how the colonial era happened long ago. It is rare that we get the chance to watch historical dynamics from the past occur before our eyes in the present. This is one such opportunity, and it explains largely why a ceasefire and exchange of hostages/prisoners was not concluded over a year ago, when reasonable terms for it were offered that acknowledged the rights and demands of both sides – unlike this proposal which centers on Israeli and Western colonial perspectives and values.

Nowhere in the text of the proposal or in the words and body language of Trump and Netanyahu is there any hint that they feel that Israelis and Palestinians should enjoy equal rights, being granted simultaneously. This is no surprise, alas, because we are still living in the global colonial era. Netanyahu himself spelled this out when he said, as he often does, that he fights for the well-being of the enlightened Western civilization against the threats of barbarism from the South.

Rami G. Khouri, a Palestinian-American from Nazareth whose family resides in Amman, Nazareth, New York, and Cambridge, MA, USA, has been a journalist, author, and analyst in the Middle East and the USA for the past 60 years. He is working on books about the craft and legacy of the journalist Anthony Shadid, the 200 top antiquities sites in Jordan, and the modern colonial legacy that continues to define governance and diplomacy in the Middle East. His work is available for free at his Substack site.

SCAN TO SHARE