

# The One-State Reality: Reading the Trump-Kushner Plan as a Morbid Symptom

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In an oft-quoted passage of the *Prison Notebooks* Antonio Gramsci describes the kind of crisis that arises after a hegemonic perspective collapses, but before a new one replaces it. “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.” In the wake of the collapse of the two-state solution paradigm as a guide for thinking or acting in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and absent another solution-based frame of reference to replace it, we do indeed witness a variety of “morbid symptoms.” One of those is that the disingenuous and fundamentally cruel plan advanced by Donald Trump, Jared Kushner, Jason Greenblatt, and Avi Berkowitz, yet contains a fundamental truth about the situation of Jews and Palestinian Arabs between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea—a truth that is mostly ignored but without which no clear or useful thinking can be done.

The truth to which I refer is that Palestine—the Land of Israel, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, is ruled by one and only one state, and its name is Israel. This is an ontological claim—an assertion about reality, about a “one-state reality” that “is.” It is not a claim about what should be. It is an understanding of reality radically different from the view that between the river and the sea there is 1) the state of Israel, within the 1949 Armistice Lines (the Green Line) and, 2) along-side it but not within it, are the West Bank and Gaza—territories that are not within or part of the state of Israel.<sup>1</sup>

Ontology is the study of existence—of what constitutes reality. Claims about ontology are “metaphysical”—they reflect judgments and apprehensions that precede theories, hypotheses, or even discrete perceptions. Every paradigm—every overarching framework of thought—relies on distinctive and largely untestable ontological commitments and metaphysical claims. Before analyzing the Trump-Kushner Plan for the ontological truth concealed within its deceptive verbiage, I will consider two revolutions in the natural sciences in order to illustrate what I mean by ontology, and the conceptual and practical

difficulties of abandoning a flawed ontology with a more accurate one.

What is fire? According to Aristotle it is one of the four basic elements, along with earth, air, and water that make up everything in the world with which we have direct contact. Aristotle explained burning as the process by which fire, as an elemental substance, was released from things that contained it, like wood. Renaissance revivals of Aristotelean ontology led to the theory of phlogiston as an invisible substance that yielded fire when things containing it were heated. Centuries of science and whole industries, such as metallurgy, were based on phlogiston. It took decades of dogged work by Lavoisier and others in the late 18th and early 19th centuries before a new paradigm for understanding chemistry arose which dispensed with phlogiston altogether. Instead, the whole idea of fire as a *substance* was replaced by metaphysics of an entirely different kind. Fire was not a thing itself, and neither was “air”—which was now understood as a mixture of “gases.” Fire was an effect of heated gases contained within fuel interacting with another gas “oxygen.” In the course of these interactions things called “molecules” were broken and reformed, yielding another kind of highly energized “thing”—plasma, which is how we apprehend fire.

For thirteen hundred years Europeans and Middle Easterners charted, explained, and predicted the locations of planets, stars, and eclipses based on the astronomical paradigm of a second-century Alexandrian Greek astronomer, Ptolemy. His overarching and fundamental belief, his “metaphysic, was that the earth was at the center of the universe. The Ptolemaic system became so successful that no one in Europe or the Middle East could be treated as an astronomer without formulating observations and arguments in terms movement on the surfaces of concentric spheres in a universe with earth at its center. To compensate for the difficulty of explaining observations in the sky based on Ptolemy’s fundamental, but distorted, geocentric assumption, scientists relied on an increasingly complex array of imaginary points, cycles, epicycles, and on “retrograde motion.” These desperate and mind-bogglingly complicated efforts to protect the paradigm were successful enough so that it was not until Kepler’s work eighty years after Copernicus that the Heliocentric theory could clearly out-perform Ptolemaic analysis.

The Trump-Kushner Plan (hereafter “the Plan”) presents a maddening incantation of traditional right-wing Zionist talking points and is spectacularly dishonest in its self-description as a vehicle for achieving Palestinian statehood. Nevertheless, compared to what is on offer from two-state solution diehards—outworn images of the land west of the Jordan divided by the Green Line into “Israel” and “not-Israel”—the ontological position of the Plan is more in line with palpable reality. The

key aspect of that reality is that regardless of their caste or legal status, all 14 million people living between the sea and the river are subject to the policies and decisions of the State of Israel.

The one-state reality is made crystal clear by the Plan's two most basic elements. The first is a list of impossible conditions Palestinians are required to meet before the "State of Palestine" can come into existence. The second is a list of Israeli prerogatives with respect to that putative state that ensures that even if the entity to be called the "State of Palestine" does come into existence, it will not be a state but rather districts for the confinement of non-citizen Arabs within the State of Israel.

Although for the years of its gestation the Plan was characterized as prioritizing economic prosperity over political solutions, in fact it adheres strictly to a schedule which postpones any economic investment whatsoever until a comprehensive political solution is achieved. Achievement of that solution requires one thing of Israel: perhaps to refrain for four years from settlement activity within carefully demarcated Palestinian zones. But it requires a very great deal of the Palestinians, including impossible political conditions whose fulfillment is to be judged by Israel. Before the "State of Palestine" can come into existence, and before any economic or infrastructural aid as described in the Plan can be delivered:

- The Palestinians shall have implemented a governing system with a constitution or another system for establishing the rule of law that provides for freedom of press, free and fair elections, respect for human rights for its citizens, protections for religious freedom and for religious minorities to observe their faith, uniform and fair enforcement of law and contractual rights, due process under law, and an independent judiciary with appropriate legal consequences and punishment established for violations of the law.
- The Palestinians shall have established transparent, independent, and credit-worthy financial institutions capable of engaging in international market transactions in the same manner as financial institutions of western democracies with appropriate governance to prevent corruption and ensure the proper use of such funds, and a legal system to protect investments and to address market-based commercial expectations....
- The Palestinians shall have ended all programs, including school curricula and textbooks, that serve to incite or promote hatred or antagonism towards its neighbors, or which compensate or incentivize criminal or violent activity.
- The Palestinians shall have achieved civilian and law enforcement control over all of its territory and demilitarized its population.
- The Palestinians shall have complied with all the other terms and conditions of this Vision.<sup>2</sup>

In short, before Palestinians will be allowed to describe themselves as

living within the “State of Palestine” they must, somehow, arrange things so that, even without a state of their own, they are living as if in Finland, Sweden, or Norway, rather than anywhere in the Middle East, including the State of Israel itself. To say the truth, both the purpose and the effect of these conditions, including Israel’s authority to decide whether they have been met, are to make the emergence of anything even called the “State of Palestine” impossible.

However, for the sake of argument, and in order clearly to appreciate how completely the Trump-Kushner Plan reflects the reality of the whole land already having been incorporated into the State of Israel, let us consider what the Plan says about the “state” that is supposedly on offer to the Palestinians.

The map of its borders (See Figure 1) depicts five jaggedly shaped zones:

- 1 a shrunken Gaza Strip connected by a road to two desolate districts in the northeastern Negev, close to but not on the Israeli-Egyptian border;
- 2 a portion of the southern West Bank reaching north to the outskirts of Jerusalem but excluding access to the Jerusalem-Jericho road and stripped of Gush Etzion, Efrat, and Tekoa in the northwest, the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea in the east, and a swath of the southern West Bank leading to Kiryat Arba (near Hebron);
- 3 a central area containing Ramallah, but deprived of wide bands of territory in the west, south, and east, bounded in the north by fingers of Israeli settlement reaching through Ariel to the Jordan Valley, and almost trisected by winding areas of Israeli settlements;
- 4 a northern zone including Nablus, Jenin, and Tulkarem, but deprived of the Jordan Valley in the East (very broadly defined and large Israeli settlement enclaves in its western and south-central portions);
- 5 a small zone including Kalkilya reaching southwest toward Ariel and, it appears, completely surrounded by Israeli settlement blocs.

The appellation “State of Palestine” applied to this archipelago of Palestinian-inhabited districts is not to be taken any more seriously than the international community took apartheid South Africa’s description of the bantustans of Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, and Ciskei as “independent nation-states.” For this reason, references to the “State of Palestine,” as described in the Plan have been placed within inverted commas.

That the five zones described as the “State of Palestine” are properly and precisely thought of as ghettos inside of Israel, within which the non-citizen Palestinian population is to be confined, is apparent from one sentence in the Plan whose significance is easy to miss. “The security barrier will be realigned to match the new borders.” (p. 14) The meaning of this sentence is that the zones within which non-citizen Palestinians



FIGURE 1  
The “State of Palestine” as depicted in the Trump-Kushner Plan

will live—divided and crisscrossed by settlement enclaves inhabited by Israeli citizens and by access roads used solely by Israeli citizens—will be surrounded by the kind of eight-meter high concrete walls that comprise much of the existing, to-be-realigned “security barrier.” Fifteen “crossings,” featuring what the Plan refers to as “new, modern and efficient” (p. 14) installations will be the only locations through which, by means of tunnels and bridges, Palestinians can enter or leave their home districts. This seems to be true whether Palestinians would be traveling from one portion of one of the five zones to another within that zone; or entering from or leaving these ghetto areas for Jordan or Egypt or entering from or leaving Israeli-citizen inhabited areas.

In fact, there is significant ambiguity with respect to “crossings.” The

Plan emphasizes that “in addition to the overriding security responsibility over the State of Palestine, the State of Israel will be responsible for security at all international crossings into the State of Palestine.” (Appendix 2c) The map provided within the published version of the Plan (Figure 1) marks fifteen locations for “tunnels and/or bridges” to be used by Palestinians. Of these only two, at the Damiya and Allenby bridges across the Jordan, can definitely be said to be “international crossings,” though the conceit of the Plan is that crossing from “The State of Palestine” to the state of Israel, or vice versa, would require crossing an international border. What is unclear is whether it is imagined that Palestinians will pass through Israeli-controlled security checkpoints at each of these fifteen crossing points, including those crossing over or under roads used by Israeli citizens or areas inhabited by them, or only those from which Palestinians could enter Israeli citizen-inhabited areas, Jordan, or Egypt. The Plan does offer a commitment “to maximize unimpeded movement throughout both states and in between states and their respective enclaves.” (p. 14). So it may be that Palestinians are to be subjected to security checks and checks of their goods at each exit from one of the ghettos, but not at tunnels and bridges leading from one district within a ghettoized zone to another district within that same zone. On the other hand, reference to efforts to “maximize” unimpeded movement, if, as is apparent from the Plan, they are subordinated to whatever security measures Israel may wish to impose, does not bode well for free and unimpeded travel by Palestinians.

In any event, as one would expect of arrangements designed to hold, monitor, and subordinate a permanently suspect and dangerous population, an uninterrupted blanket of Israeli surveillance over all ghetto areas will accompany control over the movement of all goods and people into and out of them. The constant patrol of drones over these spaces is authorized explicitly in Appendix 2c of the Plan, which stipulates that “The State of Israel will continue to maintain control over the airspace and the electromagnetic spectrum west of the Jordan river;” that the Israeli navy will have the right to impose a blockade on the “State of Palestine,” (including Gaza); and that Israeli police and military forces will be empowered to enter Palestinian districts at any time. These “incursions into the State of Palestine” are authorized as part of Israel’s “right to dismantle and destroy any facility in the State of Palestine that is used for the production of prohibited weapons or for other hostile purposes...and “to engage in necessary security measures that ensure that the State of Palestine remains demilitarized and non-threatening to the State of Israel, including from terrorist threats.”

Again, the “State of Palestine” is to be permitted to be acknowledged as such only *after* Israel judges that the Palestinians within their

designated ghettos have met the conditions that would qualify their institutional life as comparable to Sweden or Finland in its transparency, efficacy, accountability, toleration, and courtesy. It is only at that point, when Israel approves of Palestinian performance that the Plan's grandiose blueprint for investing \$50 billion in infrastructure and economic development for Palestinians will begin to be implemented. **In other words, far from substituting prosperity for *meaningful* Palestinian statehood, as many imagined would be the Trump-Kushner strategy, the Plan as published uses the impossibility of achieving *meaningless* Palestinian statehood as a rationale for maintaining economic stagnation.**

By placing control in Israel's hands over whether anything even called a "State of Palestine" can be established, and by awarding Israel prerogatives to patrol, surveil, intervene, and regulate all movement to and from the districts said to comprise it, the Plan affirms the one-state reality. Whether the archipelago of ghettos described in the Plan as "the State of Palestine" comes into formal existence or not, there is now, and will be, only one real state between the sea and the river—the state currently named "Israel."

For what, after all, is a state?

What political scientists mean by a "state" is an organization that enforces property rights. If I can keep you off my property, or even call property "mine" and have it mean something, that means there is an organization around that I think can enforce my claim to exclusive control of that property. If I don't believe such claims can be enforced, then there is no state. If I and others are uncertain about the security of claims to property then the state, such as it is, is weak. Just as the property rights of Jews, wherever they live between the Sea and the River, are a function of the power and policies of the State of Israel, so is that also true of the property rights of Palestinians, such as they are, wherever they live west of the Jordan. No Palestinian property—no piece of land, no building, no home, no furnishings, no wealth of any kind—can be preserved in the face of an Israeli government seizure or demolition order. In that light, when I say that all Palestinians west of the Jordan, whether denizens of Tulkarem, East Jerusalem, Gaza, or Jaffa, are living within Israel, what exactly do I mean by that? I mean precisely the same thing that the Israel means when it counts all Jews living west of the Jordan as living within Israel, regardless of whether they live in the West Bank, Jerusalem, the Galilee, or Tel-Aviv.

Note well, this is not to say that Israel rules the 14 million people living under its sway democratically, or with the same laws and norms applied to all populations. That is obviously not the case. But regardless

of how limited and parochial are the State of Israel's application of the liberal and democratic principles it sometimes espouses, it, and no other, is the organization, the apparatus of power, and the arena of contestation which determines, for all those living between the Sea and the River, who has what rights and who does not, who can travel and who cannot, whose lands can be possessed and utilized, and whose are off-limits or confiscated, whose home can remain standing, etc.

Again, the crucial point is ontological. For half a century, at least, most of those living within, studying, or seeking to change the lives of Jews and Arabs in Palestine or the Land of Israel, have conceived of reality in one particular way. One state, Israel, holds onto ("occupies") territory that is in the country of Palestine, or the Land of Israel, but *not* within the State of Israel. Whether one wished two states would emerge, or that the occupation would be replaced by one Arab or one Jewish or one "binational" state, the paradigmatic definition of the situation featured one state contingently controlling territory outside of it which could be the territorial basis of a second state—Palestine. This is a pre-analytic claim according to which people living west of the Jordan River either live in the State of Israel (within the Green Line) or they live in "occupied (or not yet liberated) territory." Complexities, such as classifying Arabs within East Jerusalem, or Jews living east of the Green Line, have been treated with the equivalent of Ptolemaic cycles and epicycles—Jews in the West Bank, for example, are treated "as if" they are living within the Green Line.

In sum, the "Deal of the Century" is not to be condemned because it makes a phony pretense of being a road to a two-state solution—all talk and plans of a negotiated two-state solution for at least the last decade have been phony pretenses. What distinguishes the Plan from previous doomed two-state efforts are elements within it, including, but not limited to its ratification of the one-state reality, that reflect a new realism. For example, by allocating substantial pieces of the (desolate) northeastern Negev as zones for Palestinian habitation, the Plan, for the first time since 1948, has attracted Israeli support for the principle that that the future of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees in Gaza lies in the largely uninhabited region of Israel around Gaza from which most Gazans came. The Plan also recognizes that truly massive amounts of economic investment are necessary to integrate all those living between the River and the Sea into productive economic activity. But the principle within the Plan that is most important, and that is most ironic, in view of its self-presentation as a vehicle for a "two-state solution," is that now, and forever, there is, and will be, only one real state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea—the state that is now called Israel.



What the Plan does not do, but what is left to be done by those ready to see reality for what it is, is to discard the now impossible and counter-productive pursuit of a negotiated two-state solution, and instead insist that all those living within the power of a state must be accorded equal civil and political rights within that state. For the Plan does not just falsely advertise itself as in keeping with the two-state solution, it makes a mockery of the two-state solution by using that non-implementable brand as a device for permanently denying the Palestinians the right to demand equality within the one state in which they actually live.

With Ambassador Friedman's appointment as chairman of the "Joint" (Israeli and American) committee charged to design the exact contours of Israeli annexations, it is appropriate to demand that annexation, real and complete annexation, be extended to all land and all people over which the State of Israel holds effective sway. By making that demand, the real nature of the decisive struggle that lies ahead can be established—the struggle to end the occupation, not by removing Israel from the lands it has dominated for fifty-three years, but by making all inhabitants of those lands full-fledged citizens. Only thus can Israel democratize, and only thus will the occupation end.

## Notes

- 1 For in depth treatment of the crystallization and implications of the "one-state reality," see Ian S. Lustick, *Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State Reality* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).
- 2 *Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People* (January 2020) p. 34. It should be noted that although the second condition listed refers to the "State of Palestine" and although fourth condition uses the pronoun "it" to refer to "The Palestinians," the entire list of conditions is explicitly characterized as a "predicate for the formation of a Palestinian state."