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Pal^estine

Oslo Accords accelerated the process of colonization of the Palestinian territories

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25 years after the Oslo Accords, the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians is at a standstill. Benjamin Netanyahu's Israeli government – the most right-wing in the history of the Zionist state – does not want to hear about peace negotiations. The Palestinian leadership seems incapable of digesting the failure of this dynamic launched by Yasser Arafat. The main mediator, the United States, has – with the arrival of Donald Trump – broken with its traditional diplomacy of not taking a decision that would stop the peace process. How can one explain this development, which increases the imbalance of power between Israelis and Palestinians and removes any prospect of peace? Gilbert Achcar in an interview with [L'Orient-Le Jour](#) gave some clues to understanding the turn of events since the Oslo agreements.

Are the Oslo Accords dead and buried?

The Oslo Accords were stillborn. I belong to the minority of those who, in 1993, criticised these agreements and warned against the impasse that was looming. The most famous critic of the time was the late Edward Said. These agreements are based on some kind of naive hope on the part of Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian leadership that a dynamic could be set in motion and achieve their goal of an independent Palestinian state. It was on this basis that they agreed to sign the accords by waiving the main conditions that Palestinian negotiators, especially those from the interior, had put forward up to then; including in particular the freezing of settlements, not to mention the question of Jerusalem or the question of refugees.

On the Israeli side, there was no illusion or naive hope whatsoever, the perspective was very different. The Oslo agreements were part of the perspective developed since 1967: to control the West Bank without the Palestinian populated areas, which would change the demographic balance. The colonization of the West Bank aims to create this de facto annexation of a major part of this territory, leaving the populated areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority, which finds itself playing the role of a kind of "police by proxy".

The closest thing to what the Palestinian Authority has become is the situation of the Bantustans in South Africa. That is, so-called states for the black populations, which were in fact under the domination of the South African state during the apartheid era. As critics had predicted, far from leading to a freeze followed by the dismantling of settlements, the Oslo Accords accelerated colonization. Settlement expansion doubled in the period 1993-2000, as much as in the entire period 1967-1993.

How did Oslo accelerate the process of colonization of the Palestinian territories?

The Oslo Accords created a calm that was conducive to the acceleration of colonization. Palestinian Authority control on the Palestinian side reduced considerably the risk of attacks and demonstrations. The Zionist movement seized the opportunity to intensify colonization.

How to explain the current impasse?

The process was in acute crisis until the death of Yasser Arafat in 2004. Mahmoud Abbas, the Bush administration's favourite candidate, succeeded him and, despite the fact that he went further than any Palestinian leader in submitting to the Israeli-American desiderata, he obtained nothing. It is clear that we are in a total deadlock, which was quite predictable at the time of the signing of the Oslo agreements.

Today, the situation is worsened by the fact that since 2017, the United States has had an administration that goes far beyond the traditional pro-Israeli bias of American governments. We have now an administration that is in affinity with the Israeli far right and which is, in my opinion, preparing the political conditions for an official annexation by Israel of the West Bank territories under its current control.

How would this annexation be justified to the international community?

This would be in line with the logic of the Israeli far right, which wants unilateral separation. Their problem is: what to do with the remaining Palestinian territories? The Trump administration, through Jared Kushner, tried to convince Jordan to regain control. But of course, the Jordanians do not want this hot potato. We are moving towards an official annexation, a *de jure* annexation. The pretext will be the Palestinian refusal of the famous American peace plan. The Israelis will then say: "You see, the Palestinians have always refused peace plans, so we will act unilaterally and annex the territories. Â»

Is colonization irreversible?

No, it would be possible to reverse the process if there were an American will to impose on Israel the withdrawal from the territories occupied since 1967. Obviously, it would not be possible without a major crisis in Israel, but it is not impossible. There are no more settlers in the West Bank than there were Europeans in Algeria who left the country in 1962. It is a matter of political will. That being said, the more time passes, the more the Israelis take root, and the more difficult it becomes. And with the current balance of forces, one can't see how this could happen.

Do you think there is an alternative solution to the creation of a Palestinian state?

An argument is the claim of a single state, which some call binational and others secular, without mentioning the national factor. But in my view, this is even more utopian than the withdrawal of settlers from the Territories. The logic that says that since settlers' withdrawal is impossible, there must be a single state where Palestinians have the right to vote and where there is equality of rights between Palestinians and Israelis is even more difficult to imagine today. So we are at a dead end. It is tragic, but there is no way out of this conflict looming on the horizon today.

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