**[Deceit of the century?](https://nation.com.pk/02-Feb-2020/deceit-of-the-century%22%20%5Ct%20%22_new)**

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Earlier this week, from the East Room of the White House, President Donald J. Trump, accompanied by the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, announced what he called “Deal of the Century”. This was the latest U.S. plan to, ensure that “Israel will get the security it needs; Palestinians will the State they crave.”

Unfortunately, such noble rhetoric was just that: rhetoric. The substance of President Trump’s plans made clear the fact this was, in fact, Deceit of the Century. A deceit that belies the promise of freedom to the Palestinian people, and rolls back the clock on decades of American diplomacy.

Let us put this deceit in perspective.

Jerusalem has been at the heart of Abrahamic religions, since the dawn of history in holy scriptures. All divine Abrahamic books – the Torah, the Bible, and the Quran – have references concerning Jerusalem and the children of Israel (though the Quran never mentions the name ‘Jerusalem’, and only talks about it in reference to its surroundings and people). Numerous wars have been fought over Jerusalem. Countless people have died in pursuit of Jerusalem. And Jerusalem features in all apocalyptic prophecies of monotheistic faiths. The people of Moses (A.S.) were ‘promised’ Jerusalem. Jesus (A.S.) was crucified in Jerusalem. And our Prophet Muhammad (SAWW) was carried to Jerusalem on a night (described in Surah Bani Israel), and from there ascended to Heaven.

Consequently, for more than 4 billion people today – those who prescribe to some form of Abrahamic tradition – Jerusalem continues to occupy a central place in faith, history, and prophecy.

Islam’s transaction with Jerusalem started almost immediately after establishment of a Muslim State in Medina. As the Quran continued to refer to events that took place in and around Jerusalem (as well as those that will take place in Jerusalem), this city assumed tremendous importance for those at the helm of Muslim empires. In fact, as far back as 636 A.D., the Rashidun Caliphate, under the command of Hazrat Umar (R.A.) laid siege to the city of Jerusalem (which was under the command of Patriarch Sophronius of the Byzantine Empire). The following year, in 637 A.D., the Byzantine surrendered to the Muslims, establishing Islam’s control over the city of Jerusalem and the land of Palestine.

This Muslim control over Jerusalem, and the surrounding Palestinian territory, would not be challenged for almost 450 years – till the First Crusade in 1099, when Roman Catholic Crusaders from Europe conquered Jerusalem, killing (almost all) Muslim and Jewish residents of the Promised Land.

Christian controlled and ruled over Jerusalem for less than a hundred years; in 1187, the mythic Salah-ud-Din Ayyubi laid siege to Jerusalem, forcing Balian of Ibelin to surrender the city to Muslim conquerors. Importantly, no blood was shed during this conquest, as all Jewish and Christian residents were granted amnesty or safe passage by the Muslim ruler. And thus started Islam’s almost 800-year long control of this city, under different dynasties from time to time. And with it, the name of Salah-ud-Din (read: Saladin) was etched in the Judi-Christian memory forever.

Fast-forward to the modern age; specifically, defeat of the Muslim Caliphate in WWI, and creation of State of Israel, after WWII, in 1948.

The modern arrangement, through which most of the present-day Middle-Eastern States were carved, was done at the arbitrary whims of West Allied powers – victors of the two World Wars. Emaciated Muslim States, with tainted rulers, grappled to come to terms with the new world order; feeble attempts were made to reclaim Jerusalem, - but all in vain. And the people of this land were forced to flee their land, finding abode in foreign territories and refugee camps, while dreaming to return to the olive trees of Jerusalem. This apartheid gave way to Arab-Isaeli wars, and repeated intifadas by Palestinian youth, best captured in images of young Palestinian children throwing stones at Israeli Armored Vehicles.

At the heart of this blood-soaked conflict was one small city: Jerusalem.

Throughout this agonizing period, despite pressure from successive US administrations, the international community has never fully recognized Israel’s claim on the entire city of Jerusalem. Israel took control of West Jerusalem almost immediately after creation of the State, in 1948. Later, Israel occupied East Jerusalem during the six-day war of 1967, and annexed the eastern portion of the city in 1980 – a move that remains unrecognized by most of the international community. Since then, Israel has built several Jewish-only settlements in and around key areas of East Jerusalem, in an effort to cement its control over the entire city. These settlements, till date, are deemed illegal under international law. Palestinians still demand that East Jerusalem be declared the capital of (a future) Palestinian state. Some 330,000 Palestinians live in East Jerusalem, along with almost 200,000 Jewish settlers. And in recognition of the volatile nature of this issue, and in deference to international law as well as repeated UN Resolutions endorsing the same, no country (of note) has recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. That is, until Trump.

In 2017, the Trump administration announced its plans for initiating the process of shifting Israel’s U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. And, as a result, to recognize Jerusalem as the de facto capital of Israel. Something so asinine could only be expected from an individual like Trump, who has no sense of history, politics and the explosive nature of religious volatility associated with Jerusalem. If the American President wants to hasten the clock of history, and “induce” the Second Coming… he should know that he would be on the wrong side of it. If this is just a political move to court the Evangelical vote within the U.S., that is an even dumber reason to tempt this (final) war between civilizations.

Trumps 2017 announcement was met with a resounding condemnation from the international community. However, the Muslim community – including its 41-country military alliance – remained largely impotent in causing any ripples of consequence.

Emboldened by this impotence, this week, Trump has unleased this new “deal”. One that, to quote BBC, “gives Mr Netanyahu all he wants - and offers Palestinians very little; a sort-of state that will be truncated, without proper sovereignty, surrounded by Israel’s territory and threaded between Jewish settlements.” In all, the Palestinians will now be refugees in the larger Israel. And another generation of their orphaned children will now be raised under the barrel of Isreli guns. Still, for some reason, all of the Middle East, with all its wealth, oil, and military muscle, remains in bed with the American Zionist plans.

Is this impotence of the Muslim world, part of the plan? Of course it is part of the American-Israeli plan. But is part of some predestined plan, prophesized in all Abrahamic religions?

The Quran, declares, “Then we said to the Israelites, ‘Now you should settle down in the [Promised] land, and when the prescribed time of Resurrection comes about, We will gather all of you [there] together.’” – [Quran 17:104].

Are we living through such a time? Is this the “gathering” of the Isrealites in the Promised land? Will this culminate in a battle between good and evil; the final coming; the climactic drop-scene in the eternal conflict that rests at the heart of humankind’s redemption. Perhaps. But if that is the case, there will be no redemption for people like us, those who remain neutral in times of exigencies. There will be no sympathy for the bystanders. And each of us, individually as well as collectively, must choose – here and now – which side are we on.