

Gaza ? not so much a genocide; more a real estate opportunity

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OUR WORLD TODAY

A motley band of greedy fantasists got together at the White House a week ago (Aug. 27) and came up with a cunning plan to bring peace to the Middle East while lining their own pockets at the same time. It was 'leaked' within days, as it was clearly meant to be, and since then the sound of outraged clucking has been loud in the land.

It is 'a Trumpian get-rich-quick scheme reliant on war crimes, AI and tourism,' wrote the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

'It's a textbook case of international crimes on an unimaginable scale: forcible population transfer, demographic engineering and collective punishment,' said Duncan Grant, head of Swiss-based human rights group Trial International.

'It's insane,' said H.A. Hellyer of the Royal United Services Institute.

They are right, so far as they go ? but they only know the half of it. The other half is that this is an insane crime that could actually happen.

As you would expect at a meeting chaired by Donald Trump, half the participants were real estate developers by trade ? himself, his ignorant 'Special Envoy for the Middle East' Steve Witkoff, and his son-in-law Jared Kushner. Marco Rubio was there as National Security Adviser, and former British prime minister Tony Blair to raise the tone a bit.

He can't raise it all that much, because he is a war criminal himself. (He has admitted that he would have invaded Iraq even if he had known that there were no 'weapons of mass destruction' there.) But he and his Tony Blair Institute (TBI) have spent the past nine years scrounging money from various Middle Eastern potentates and investors, so he has contacts.

The meeting was intended to flesh out the plan for 'cleansing' Gaza of its 2 million current residents that Trump first mooted early this year and replacing them with an unspecified but wealthy 'international' population who would turn it into 'the Riviera of the Middle East'. You know, like Saint-Tropez, Antibes and the Cinque Terre, only flatter and farther east.

The Palestinians who are living and dying in Gaza now would be 'relocated' to some other country while 40 million tonnes of rubble, unexploded ordnance and decomposed bodies are cleared away and a shiny new city is built on the ruins. Property owners will be given digital tokens that they can spend to resettle elsewhere or maybe even buy property in Gaza again.

The United States will govern Gaza as a 'trusteeship' for at least 10 years, with no information on what happens after that.

The immense cost of clearing up the devastation and building a new 'Land of Oz' would be borne by private investors, who could expect a fourfold return on their capital in a decade. And everyone will live happily ever after.

There are different levels of self-deception operating among the various political and financial groups that may be inveigled into supporting this bizarre and illegal project.

Most naive are those who believe this is a sincerely meant and viable plan. This may include Donald Trump, who is probably blinded by the ever-receding vision of the Nobel Peace Prize.

Then there are those who pride themselves on their cynicism and have worked out that it is just 'a cover story for ethnic cleansing', as the Washington Post put it. It gives Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin 'Bibi' Netanyahu something to say while his troops drive the

Palestinians into exile, and he can just 'change his mind' later about letting them return.

And then there are the true cynics, most of them Arabs, who know all of the above and still think that the Riviera of the Middle East may come to pass. They base this view on their conviction that the governing Arab elites have given up on the Palestinians and would accept Israeli annexation not only of the Gaza Strip but also of the West Bank.

Here's what Ragheda Dergham wrote on Aug. 31: 'Trump and Kushner have calculated that Arab states, particularly in the Gulf, will not jeopardize their prized bilateral relationships with the Trump administration.

Eventually, they believe, these countries will accept the new status quo in Gaza and, later, the West Bank, however bitterly...

'Neither Arab states nor the Islamic Republic of Iran, nor Turkey or the broader Islamic world, will do more than protest ' albeit in varying forms ' against US support for Israeli plans to remove Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank through either forced or 'voluntary' displacement, in service of the biblical project to remake these territories into a singular Jewish state.'

I'm afraid she may be right, in which case Israel may have 'King Bibi' forever. Of course, Ragheda Dergham lives in Lebanon.

In most other countries of the Arab world, she'd be in jail.