A birthday gift

With the US embassy in Israel slated to shift to Jerusalem, the Zionist state is a step closer to erasing a people’s history even as it continues its war without end against neighbours

It is not clear yet if US President Trump will leave stormy Washington DC long enough for in-person delivery of gifts promised to Israel on its 70th anniversary. A trip that plays to his base of religious zealots may be welcome diversion from preoccupations with porn stars and lies. However that pans out, he has already rendered his gratitude to Las Vegas casino operator Sheldon Adelson, a shady financial benefactor he shares with Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

On May 14, with the US embassy in Israel shifting to Jerusalem, the Zionist state would have completed one more step in its grand project of erasing another people’s history and culture. A brief interlude when it played the charade of seeking justice, the US would have signalled that dispossession once begun is irreversible, international covenants be damned.

The only recourse for the affected people is to get used to it, something the people of Gaza have shown no inclination for. From weeks before the anniversary, Israel has extended its mandate over lost homelands by marching to the highly fortified fence that marks the land formally colonised by Israel. They have faced brutal force which, in six weekly protests following Friday prayers, claimed 51 lives. Human Rights Watch called the killings “unlawful”, going right up the military chain of command to the apex of the political leadership, meriting an investigation by the International Criminal Court.

A week before the key date in Israel’s history rolled around, Trump was working on adding a bonus to the gift already announced. All through the 2016 election campaign that he won, Trump kept up a stream of invective against the Islamic Republic of Iran. He had been an enthusiastic campaigner for sanctions, possibly extending to punitive military action if the Islamic Republic failed to comply with a regime of “anytime, anywhere” inspections. The template was the punishing regime that the US and UK — with an acquisitive UN Security Council failing to offer resistance — imposed on Iraq through the 1990s, often seeking provocative intrusions into the innermost precincts of the Iraqi state on laughable grounds.

It was a policy of regime change pursued through a disarmament agenda, which led by its own logic to the invasion of 2003. Obama’s decision to change tack in 2013 came from intimate encounters with the toxic legacy of that invasion, including the vast increase in strategic clout that accrued to Iran from the collapse of the Iraqi state.

Unrepentant war hawks were pushing for escalation in line with a blinkered military reading. Pragmatists spoke of the need to keep Iran onside to stabilise the situation in Iraq. Obama saw the sense of the latter viewpoint but had to placate the paranoid anxieties that Iran’s borderline violations of NPT rules induced.

Long and arduous negotiations led to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), agreed in July 2015 between Iran, the P5 of the UN Security Council, Germany, and the European Union. Israel reacted furiously, rehashing information from the 1970s, accusing Iran of attempting to reproduce Iraq’s pre-1990s Uranus-3 programme.

The collapse of the Iraqi state has sent tremors across the region

Israel at 70

If intervening in Gaza and Syria, Israel shows that dispossession once begun is irreversible

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