



Normalization: A Palestinian Perspective

Disclaimer

Throughout this bulletin, the term "Israel" is referred to as the **Israeli occupying state**, in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions, including **UN Security Council Resolution 242 (1967)** and **General Assembly Resolution 194 (1948)**, which call for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied territories and the recognition of Palestinian rights to self-determination and sovereignty. The Israeli occupying state's ongoing policies of military occupation, annexation, and systemic discrimination against Palestinians violate international humanitarian law, including the **Fourth Geneva Convention**. Numerous international organizations, such as **Amnesty International** and **Human Rights Watch**, have described these actions as apartheid, and some argue they amount to genocidal practices under the **Genocide Convention** (Amnesty International, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2021; United Nations, 1948).

This bulletin critically addresses normalization agreements in the context of these ongoing legal violations, systemic oppression, and the broader impact on Palestinian lives.

Definition of Normalization

A. Normalisation Defined:

Normalization is commonly understood as the process of making something abnormal, unusual, or problematic appear acceptable and routine. In international relations, it often refers to establishing regular, peaceful relations between entities previously in conflict or non-aligned. This shift is typically marked by diplomatic recognition, trade agreements, and various forms of cooperation, signaling a move from hostility to peaceful coexistence (Barnett & Duvall, 2005; Buzan, 2004).

However, normalization is not merely a political or diplomatic act; it involves a deeper process of conditioning public perceptions and narratives to accept new realities, even when those realities conflict with principles of justice, equality, or historical grievances (Foucault, 1977). Therefore, normalization is not value-neutral; it encompasses power dynamics that favor political or economic interests over ethical considerations, often prioritizing the interests of dominant powers (Buzan, 2004; Said, 1978).

B. From a Palestinian Perspective:

From a Palestinian perspective, normalization—especially with the Israeli occupying state—represents a legitimization of ongoing injustices. Without resolving key issues such as the end of military occupation, settlement expansion, the right of return for refugees, and recognition of Palestinian statehood, normalization is perceived as complicit in the perpetuation of Palestinian subjugation (Barakat, 2020; Bishara, 2018). Palestinians argue that true normalization can only follow compliance with international law and respect for Palestinian rights, not as a precursor to those conditions being met (Said, 1978).

Normalization, in the context of Palestine, is perceived as the acceptance of imposed realities, such as the ongoing military occupation, the blockade of Gaza, systemic discrimination against Palestinians, and the most recent year-long genocide in Gaza (Bishara, 2018; Pappé, 2018). For Palestinians, normalization agreements often signify the abandonment of their cause by former allies and an international community that prioritizes strategic and economic interests over justice and human life (Bishara, 2018; Farsakh, 2021).



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Historical Context of Normalization: Key Events and Their Repercussions

1. 1948 - The Nakba and Creation of the Israeli Occupying State

The Nakba ("catastrophe") in 1948 marked the mass displacement of over 700,000 Palestinians during the creation of the Israeli occupying state. This foundational event is key to understanding Palestinian resistance and grievances. The Nakba remains a symbol of Palestinian dispossession, which normalization efforts, past and present, often fail to address (United Nations, n.d.).

2. 1979 - The Camp David Accords:

Egypt became the first Arab state to normalize relations with the Israeli occupying state by signing the Camp David Accords in 1979, a move mediated by the United States (Britannica, n.d.). While viewed as a diplomatic breakthrough, the treaty sidelined Palestinian interests and fractured Arab solidarity. Palestinians considered the treaty a betrayal as it prioritized Egyptian national interests without achieving substantial progress on Palestinian rights (Middle East Monitor, 2021).

3. 1993-1995 The Oslo Accords:

The Oslo Accords marked a major shift by facilitating direct negotiations between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Israeli occupying state (Visoka & Lemay-Hébert, 2023). Initially heralded as a step toward peace, the agreements failed to resolve critical issues such as the right of return for refugees, settlement expansion, and the future of Jerusalem. Instead, Oslo entrenched a power imbalance and allowed the Israeli occupying state to continue expanding settlements, deepening Palestinian disenfranchisement (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

4. 1994 - The Wadi Araba Treaty:

The Wadi Araba Treaty, signed between Jordan and the Israeli occupying state in 1994, normalized relations following a 46-year state of war (Middle East Monitor, 2021). Although it brought diplomatic and economic benefits to Jordan, many Palestinians saw the treaty as another instance of Arab states normalizing relations

with the occupation state without securing tangible outcomes for Palestinian self-determination. The agreement symbolized a continuation of regional trends that prioritized state-to-state diplomacy at the expense of addressing the root causes of the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupying state.

5. 2020 - The Abraham Accords:

The Abraham Accords, signed in 2020, marked a significant shift in the regional political landscape. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco normalized relations with the Israeli occupying state without requiring any concessions related to Palestinian rights (Arab Center Washington DC, 2023). These agreements, brokered by the United States, emphasized economic and security cooperation over addressing the Palestinian issue, further isolating Palestinians diplomatically and signaling a realignment of regional priorities (Arab Center DC, 2023).

6. Current Trends: Saudi Arabia and Others:

Saudi Arabia, although yet to formalize relations with the Israeli occupying state, has signaled a potential shift towards normalization (Arab News, 2023). Recent discussions indicate that Saudi Arabia is considering such a move, motivated by security and economic interests rather than solidarity with the Palestinian cause (Axios, 2023). This reflects broader trends across the Gulf and the Middle East, where state-to-state normalization increasingly takes precedence over addressing Palestinian rights and aspirations.



Critical Angles of Analysis on Normalization

Normalization reflects a profound geopolitical realignment where Arab states increasingly prioritize economic and strategic alliances over solidarity with Palestine. This shift signifies a recalibration of Middle Eastern power dynamics, where the Israeli occupying state is integrated into a regional order aimed at countering perceived threats like Iran (Brookings, 2023).

Arab states now view cooperation with the occupying state as beneficial for security, trade, and technological advancement, thereby deprioritizing the Palestinian cause in the process. This realignment is not just a political shift; it is a moral failure, normalizing occupation and apartheid as acceptable components of regional diplomacy.

Western influence plays a critical role in pushing for these normalization agreements. Western states—particularly the United States—have long sought to bolster their geopolitical influence in the region by maintaining the status quo of Israeli dominance (Arab Center Washington DC, 2023). By framing normalization as a victory for peace and stability, Western powers attempt to obscure the continued violence and oppression of the occupation (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

The reality is that normalization, without addressing the core issues of occupation, settlements, and refugees, serves as a neocolonial tool. It reinforces the Israeli occupying state's control over Palestinian land and lives, enabling it to further integrate into the global economy and regional politics without being held accountable for its violations of international law (Brookings, 2023).

Normalization is thus not an act of peacemaking; it is an act of complicity. It allows the Israeli occupying state to present itself as a legitimate actor on the world stage while continuing its policies of ethnic cleansing, settlement expansion, and apartheid against Palestinians.

The agreements reached between Arab states and the occupying state are, in essence, agreements to disregard Palestinian rights. This is the critical point that must be highlighted: normalization, as it stands, serves to perpetuate the occupation, not to end it. It is an instrument of control, used to legitimize the Israeli occupying state's presence in the region while erasing the Palestinian people's right to self-determination (Arab Reform, n.d.).

From a Palestinian perspective, normalization agreements are not just political betrayals; they represent a fundamental negation of the Palestinian right to exist as a people with their own land, culture, and identity. They undermine the moral foundations of international law and human rights by allowing the occupying state to escape accountability, and they send a clear signal to Palestinians that their struggle is expendable. The future of normalization, if left unchallenged, will only further entrench the systems of apartheid and occupation, leaving Palestinians with fewer allies, less leverage, and an ever-shrinking space for hope.



The Impact of Normalization on Palestinians

Normalization has had profound and devastating impacts on Palestinians across political, economic, societal, and psychological dimensions. Politically, normalization agreements have significantly weakened Palestine's position on the global stage by fragmenting regional solidarity and reducing collective pressure on the Israeli occupying state to address Palestinian grievances (Washington Institute, n.d.). As more Arab states normalize relations without requiring Israeli concessions, the traditional Arab stance that linked peace with Palestinian rights has been diluted, leaving Palestinians feeling abandoned on the international stage. This fragmentation undermines the unified front necessary to advocate effectively for Palestinian self-determination and adherence to international law.

Economically, normalization has entrenched Palestinian dependency. The Israeli occupying state gains access to regional markets, benefiting from trade and technology partnerships, while Palestinians remain trapped in a colonial system of economic dependency (Amnesty International, 2022). The occupation controls every aspect of Palestinian life—from the borders to natural resources—leaving the Palestinian economy stifled and dependent on international aid and Israeli permits. As Arab states now engage in economic partnerships with the Israeli occupying state, they reinforce the very systems that oppress Palestinians, further consolidating Israeli control over the region's markets and resources, while Palestinians remain impoverished and excluded from the benefits of economic integration.

Socially, normalization has created deep fractures within Palestinian communities, fostering disillusionment and despair. The normalization of relations with the Israeli occupying state sends a clear message: the Palestinian cause is no longer a priority, and the injustices faced by Palestinians are not enough to prevent regional states from pursuing their own interests (Arab Reform, n.d.).

This creates internal divisions, weakening the national movement and challenging the Palestinian resistance ethos that has long defined the struggle for liberation. The cultural impact is profound, as normalization subtly pushes for a normalization of the occupation itself, presenting the status quo as acceptable and diminishing the significance of Palestinian grievances.

Psychologically, normalization represents a form of erasure. It tells Palestinians that their struggle, history, and aspirations for self-determination are irrelevant in the face of geopolitical expediency (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The psychological toll of this cannot be understated. Palestinians, who have resisted for generations, now face a regional consensus that bypasses their rights. The narrative is being reshaped: coexistence with the occupation state is possible without addressing systemic inequality and occupation. In the end, this erasure of Palestinian grievances not only weakens their collective memory of resistance but also threatens to normalize the very systems of oppression that seek to erase their existence.

Conclusion: The Future of Normalization and Palestinian Rights

Normalization, from a Palestinian perspective, is fraught with contradictions and power dynamics that favor the Israeli occupying state while marginalizing Palestinian rights. Despite being framed as steps towards peace, these efforts often reinforce the status quo of occupation and inequality, undermining the pursuit of justice and self-determination for Palestinians.

The future of normalization is likely to continue along a path that prioritizes geopolitical alliances and economic benefits over addressing the core grievances of the Palestinian people. This trajectory risks further destabilizing the region as it fails to resolve the underlying conflict and perpetuates systemic oppression. Continued normalization without meaningful concessions will likely lead to increased Palestinian disillusionment and exacerbate regional tensions, particularly with countries opposed to the occupying state (Brookings, 2023).

True normalization, from a Palestinian viewpoint, should not be about accepting imposed realities but about achieving a just and equitable resolution to the Palestinian Cause that respects Palestinian rights, adheres to international law, and recognizes the historical injustices that underpin the ongoing struggle. It is imperative for international actors and Arab states to prioritize justice, accountability, and the fulfillment of Palestinian aspirations over superficial normalization efforts that entrench the occupation.

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