

Israel's 50-Year Time Bomb

In the quest to change Israel's very nature, the Netanyahu government is pushing Palestinians to the edge – with the support of the Trump White House, says Dan Steinbock.

By **Dan Steinbock**

Special to Consortium News



The Trump White House and the Netanyahu government are fostering an extraordinary time bomb between Israel and Palestine in the name of “peace and progress,” warned a recent report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The report unsurprisingly said that “deepening rifts between key stakeholders and surging violence in Gaza further imperil prospects for peace.”

While economic and strategic polarization is steadily deepening between the two sides, the “peace initiatives” of the Trump White House are undermining half a century of American diplomacy and pushing the region closer to an abyss.

In the past, the Netanyahu government has vehemently opposed all parallels with South African apartheid. Unfortunately, new data suggests that under apartheid South African blacks had more to hope for than Palestinians today.

Unsettling Parallels

Between 1994 and 2017, Israeli GDP per capita, adjusted to purchasing power parity, increased by 150 percent; in the West Bank and Gaza, the comparable figure was 160 percent. Yet, the Palestinian starting-point is so low that progress in living standards is largely fiction.

In 1994 – amid the peace talks in Oslo – Palestinian living standards were only 6.4 percent (\$1,526) of the Israeli level (\$23,693) (**Figure a**). At the time, the hope was that peace would bring increasing stability, which would foster prosperity and rapid catch-up growth – until the radical-right assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin triggered still another cycle of violence.

Last year, Palestinian living standards were about 7.3 percent (\$2,494) of the Israeli level (\$34,135). After more than two decades of new wars and friction, terrorism and restrictions, the catch-up has amounted to less than a percentage point.

Let's set aside political debates about the causes and only focus on economic facts; i.e., changes in income polarization. And let's compare the last two decades of apartheid South Africa with the past two decades between Israel and Palestinians. In the mid-70s, black South Africans' annual per capita income relative to white levels was about 8.6 percent; that is, two percent higher relative to the Palestinian level vis-a-vis the Israelis.

As the apartheid came to an end in a series of steps that led to the formation of a democratic government in 1994, black South Africans' annual per capita income relative to the whites climbed to almost 14 percent whereas the comparable Palestinian level remained only *half* of that figure last year (**Figure b**).

Ironically, South African apartheid was more conducive to economic progress in its last two decades than life in the West Bank and Gaza in the past two decades.

Moreover, the Netanyahu government's economic policies have also dramatically increased economic polarization in Israel. In the early 1990s, the Gini coefficient, a measure of inequality, was around 35 in Israel, at the level of Portugal and Italy. Closer to 43 today, it is among the highest in OECD countries, and at the level of Nigeria and Zimbabwe. But there may be still worse ahead.

Undermining Israeli Constitution

Protests in Gaza ahead of, and turbulence since Israel's Independence Day and the relocation of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem in May, mark the most serious escalation since the 2014 war. With his decision, President Trump departed from the decades-long U.S. executive branch practice not to recognize Israeli sovereignty over any part of Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, a steep decrease in Palestinian Authority and external funding to Gaza since 2017 has worsened already dangerous humanitarian conditions there. According to the World Bank, Gazans' real per capita incomes have fallen by one-third since 1994, owing largely to the West Bank-Gaza split and to Israel's and Egypt's tight controls on goods and people transiting Gaza's borders.

Instead of seeking to alleviate acute distress in the region, the White House

has given de facto support to the new nation-state law, which defines Israel as a Jewish nation-state, despite a significant Arab minority. Unsurprisingly, the new law has been opposed by demonstrations and a high-profile petition by Israeli intellectuals – including Amos Oz, David Grossman, A. B. Yehoshua, Eshkol Nevo, Etgar Keret and Orly Castel-Bloom – who demand the Netanyahu government to abolish it: “The nation-state law, according to which the State of Israel is the national state of the Jews only, expressly permits racial and religious discrimination, nullifies Arabic as an official language alongside Hebrew, does not mention democracy as the foundation of the country and does not mention equality as a basic value.”

In this status quo, Trump’s indiscriminate support for the Netanyahu government effectively nullifies any remaining impression about the U.S. as a “neutral arbiter” in the peace process. What makes the moment even more dangerous is Netanyahu’s inclination to ignore the warnings of Israel’s highest defense authorities, the willingness of the Trump administration to embolden these fatal shifts, and the erosion of any remaining hope on the Palestinian side.

Half Century of Missed Warnings

At the eve of the Yom Kippur War in 1973, when I toured the West Bank and Gaza, what was most striking was the apparent calm on the surface and the lingering tensions behind the official façade. It was this odd mixture of hollow expectations and raw realities that accounted for the nightmares that ensued.

After the Yom Kippur War, the Labor coalition began to expand the boundaries of Jerusalem eastward, which encouraged a group of Messianic settlers to create a foothold in the West Bank, including Ma’ale Adumim by the Gush Emunim which sparked a protest by the “Peace Now” movement. I was there, as was my good friend Amos Oz, the famous Israeli author and one of the leaders of the peace movement. The concern was that if the settlers were permitted to create a substantial de facto presence, it might be legitimized over time with de jure measures, which would undermine Israel’s foundations, polarize the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians, while fostering cycles of terror and conflicts.

Despite a relatively broad popular opposition against the settlements, successive Israeli governments failed to contain them, despite Egyptian President Sadat’s bold peace initiative. Once again, the writing on the wall was ignored and the ‘80s wars in Lebanon ensued, along with the first large-scale Palestinian uprising against Israel in the West Bank and Gaza at the turn of the ‘90s. That’s when the Madrid Conference in 1991 and the subsequent Oslo Accords offered a glimpse of an alternative future scenario – but one that perished after Rabin’s assassination.

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Today, half a century has passed from the Six-Day War and the Israeli conquest of the West Bank and Gaza. According to the Peace Index by the Israel Democracy Institute, last July three out of every four Israelis (74 percent) viewed the chances of Trump's peace plan being a success as low or very low. According to the most recent survey, 89 percent of Israeli Jews do not see peace in the horizon. Almost half of Israeli Jews believe the Palestinians should have a state of their own. More think the two-state solution would be impossible to implement. After a generation of increasing bitterness, the share of the skeptics is relatively higher in younger age groups.

The message is fairly clear. Most Israelis believe that President Trump's initiatives are undermining peace in the region. Most support a two-state plan. But since Washington is not seen as a neutral arbiter, a lasting peace plan is not enforceable.

As the U.S. provides one-third of the annual budget of the UNRWA, the vital relief agency for Palestine refugees since 1948, and has refused to make further contributions, some 5.4 million Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza, and in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria find themselves in a new situation.

Reportedly, Israel supported only gradual reduction of the UNRWA's funding and no reductions in Gaza until Netanyahu changed course without consulting his own security officials. Meanwhile, leading Israeli defense authorities have suggested that steep UNRWA cuts could further radicalize Gaza and destabilize the West Bank.

As the IMF data suggests, the status quo is entering an entirely new stage, in which economic agony could result in a failed state before an actual state is formed, while militarization of the crisis and the absence of hope on the Palestinian side could unleash even more desperate waves of terror internationally.

Half a century of policy mistakes should be an adequate warning.

Dan Steinbock is the founder of Difference Group and has served as research director of international business at the India, China and America Institute (US) and a visiting fellow at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies (China) and the EU Center (Singapore). For more, see <http://www.differencegroup.net/>

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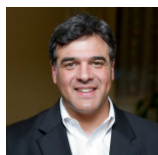
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How the FBI Silences Whistleblowers

Speaking truth to power has ruined Darin Jones, a former FBI contract specialist who reported evidence of serious procurement improprieties. He should be the last federal whistleblower victimized, writes John Kiriakou.

By **John Kiriakou**

Special to Consortium News



The idea of “whistleblowing” has been in the news a great deal.

Is the anonymous author of a recent [New York Times](#) op-ed eviscerating the president a whistleblower?

Is the victim of an [alleged sexual assault](#) by Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh a whistleblower?

I’m fortunate to have [access to the media](#) to talk about torture after [blowing the whistle](#) on the [CIA’s program](#). I think Ed Snowden, Tom Drake and others would say the same thing about the aftermath of their own whistleblowing.

Cost of Doing the Right Thing

The problem is that we are the exception to the rule. Most whistleblowers either suffer in anonymity or are personally, professionally, socially and financially ruined for speaking truth to power. Darin Jones is one of those people. He’s one

of the people silenced in Barack Obama's war on whistleblowers. And he continues to suffer under Donald Trump.

Jones was an FBI supervisory contract specialist who in 2012 reported evidence of serious procurement improprieties to his superior. Jones maintained that Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC) had been awarded a \$40 million contract improperly because a former FBI official with responsibility for granting the contract then was hired as a consultant at CSC. Jones said, rightly, that this was a violation of the Procurement Integrity Act. He made seven other disclosures alleging financial improprieties in the FBI, and he was promptly fired for his troubles.



Remember, the United States has a Whistleblower Protection Act. Any federal employee who brings to light evidence of waste, fraud, abuse, illegality, or threats to the public health or public safety is protected under federal statute.

The FBI didn't care, though. Jones was a troublemaker. He was talking about his fellow FBI agents. And he had to be silenced.

Immediately upon his firing, Jones appealed. He was not reinstated, however, because he had made his revelation to his supervisor and not to one of the nine people on the FBI leadership-approved list of who could hear a whistleblower complaint. Jones appealed again, beginning a more than four-year odyssey.

Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) is the champion of whistleblowers on Capitol Hill, whether you like his politics or not. Jones contacted Grassley and asked for help. His dismissal was clearly retaliation for his revelations and was illegal, according to the whistleblower protection law. Grassley agreed and wrote three

separate letters to then-FBI director James Comey and then-Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates. None were answered.

Grassley urged the Justice Department to reinstate Jones, saying that his dismissal was a violation of the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act of 2016, which strengthened the original whistleblower protection law. He added that when Yates appeared before his Senate Judiciary Committee for her confirmation hearings earlier in the year, she promised "to improve the process for adjudicating claims of retaliation, including expanding the list of persons to whom a protected disclosure may be made."

She never did that. In fact, Yates ordered the director of the Justice Department's "Professional Misconduct Review Unit" to write to Jones and to tell him, "The Deputy Attorney General's review is complete and her decision is final. Your case is no longer pending. You should not expect to receive any future communications that you or any other organization or individuals may submit with regard to your whistleblower reprisal case." In other words, the official policy of the Justice Department was to ignore the law and to give the Senate Judiciary Committee chairman and the whistleblower himself the middle finger.

Dunn, Porter F.

From: Jones, Darin A.
Sent: Friday, April 20, 2012 2:58 PM
To: Kelley, Patrick W. (DO)(FBI)
Cc: Haley, Richard L.; Dunn, Porter F.
Subject: Concern of whether an OCI and/or Procurement Integrity Act violation exists with the FBI's procurement of the new Enterprise Operations Center (EOC)

Importance: High

Categories: Red Category

Pat,

Good Afternoon. Per our phone conversation yesterday, I am sending you the email you requested describing the concerns the Procurement Section / Facilities Contracts Unit has regarding whether an Organizational Conflict of Interest (OCI; see FAR Subpart 9.5) and/or Procurement Integrity Act violation exists with the FBI's procurement of the new Enterprise Operations Center (EOC) that was awarded to Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC) in August 2011.

- The issue in question is whether the contractor, CSC, was improperly awarded the FBI's new \$40M EOC task order due to a conflict of interest and/or Procurement Integrity Act violation because the former ITSD AD, Dan Dubree, who was involved in the EOC requirement before and after task order award, has been reported to be working for CSC.

- There does not appear to be any question regarding whether Mr. Dubree was involved in the EOC requirement both before and after task order award. I have never met Mr. Dubree, and I have no knowledge of his involvement with this procurement other than seeing his name on an OTD EC from Dec 2011 and hearing his name being mentioned in meetings/conversations where others have stated that he was involved.

The FBI's response was equally bad, albeit predictable. The FBI's Office of the General Counsel wrote to Jones, "The FBI has advised you that it will not conduct further investigation into your allegations that the FBI removed you from employment because you reported a compliance concern and retaliated against you in violation of applicable whistleblower retaliation protection regulations. The FBI has met its legal obligations and considers this matter closed without

any basis for further review or reopening. Please be advised that the FBI will not respond to any additional correspondence or emails related to or arising from the termination of your employment.”

That’s another middle finger.

Note also that the FBI refers to “whistleblower regulations.” It’s not a regulation. It’s a law. And the FBI, too, has to respect and follow the law even when they don’t want to.

End Victimization of Whistleblowers

The bottom line here, though, is that Darin Jones did the right thing. He did the honorable thing. He did the ethical, legal, and moral thing. And he paid for it with his career. Like other federal whistleblowers, he’s ruined financially. Friends and family members have walked away from him. He can’t find a job. I can tell you from firsthand experience that the psychological weight of the fallout from whistleblowing is sometimes too much to handle.

Jones’ friends and supporters are creating a GoFundMe campaign to help him through this horrible period.

We also need to keep up the heat on the FBI, the CIA, NSA, TSA, and every other governmental organization that victimizes whistleblowers.

We have to support Chuck Grassley and others on Capitol Hill who are trying to protect whistleblowers.

We have to force our own elected officials to do the same. After all, *they* work for *us*.

Our goal should be a simple one. Work hard to ensure that Darin Jones is the last federal whistleblower to be treated this way.

John Kiriakou is a former CIA counterterrorism officer and a former senior investigator with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. John became the sixth whistleblower indicted by the Obama administration under the Espionage Act – a law designed to punish spies. He served 23 months in prison as a result of his attempts to oppose the Bush administration’s torture program.

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