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Washington Watch

ELEVATING
PALESTINIANS

By Dr James J Zogby

It was 40 years ago that I co-founded the Palestine Human Rights Campaign (PHRC) and wrote "Palestinians, the Invisible Victims". I was concerned that in the American mind the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had been reduced to a simple equation: Israeli humanity versus the Palestinian problem. When most Americans thought of the conflict they were able to imagine Israelis as people just like us. They were parents who loved their families. They wanted what we wanted - peace, prosperity, and a chance to watch their children grow and realize their dreams. They had names and faces. They experienced pain and loss. They were real.

Palestinians, on the other hand, were, at best, presented as an abstraction. They were objectified into a faceless mass, without names or personalities. When spoken of at all, they were refugees or terrorists or, after a conflict, mere numbers in a body count. We did not know them as individual people and what we did know was cast in negative stereotypes. The only emotions we ascribed to them were that they were angry and violent and not to be trusted. They were not people to be supported, but a problem to be solved.

It was through this lens that most Americans, both policy makers and the public, at large, viewed the conflict. When given the choice between a people or a problem, it was an easy call to support the Israeli people. This framing of the issue was not by accident. Rather it was the result of a systematic campaign to dehumanize the one side while humanizing the other. It was best captured by the 1960's propaganda film "The Exodus" which transposed the then popular American narrative of pioneers confronting the Indians onto the story of "courageous Israelis" fighting the savage "Arab natives".

During the following decades, this framing of the conflict continued. In 1981, I reported on TV news coverage of a cross border confrontation between Israel and the PLO in Lebanon. On the first day, two Israelis were killed. TV cameras were there interviewing weeping family members, telling their story of fear and pain. The next day Israeli jets bombed the Fakhani neighborhood in West Beirut killing over 383 Lebanese and Palestinian civilians. That night, the TV cameras were again in Northern Israel with more follow up interviews. There was no coverage from Lebanon, just reports of an Arab body count. When the TV coverage did occur a day later, the reporter stood at the end of a bombed out street showing massive destruction. No one was interviewed, no personal stories were told. In Israel the story was the people, in Lebanon it was the buildings and a body count.

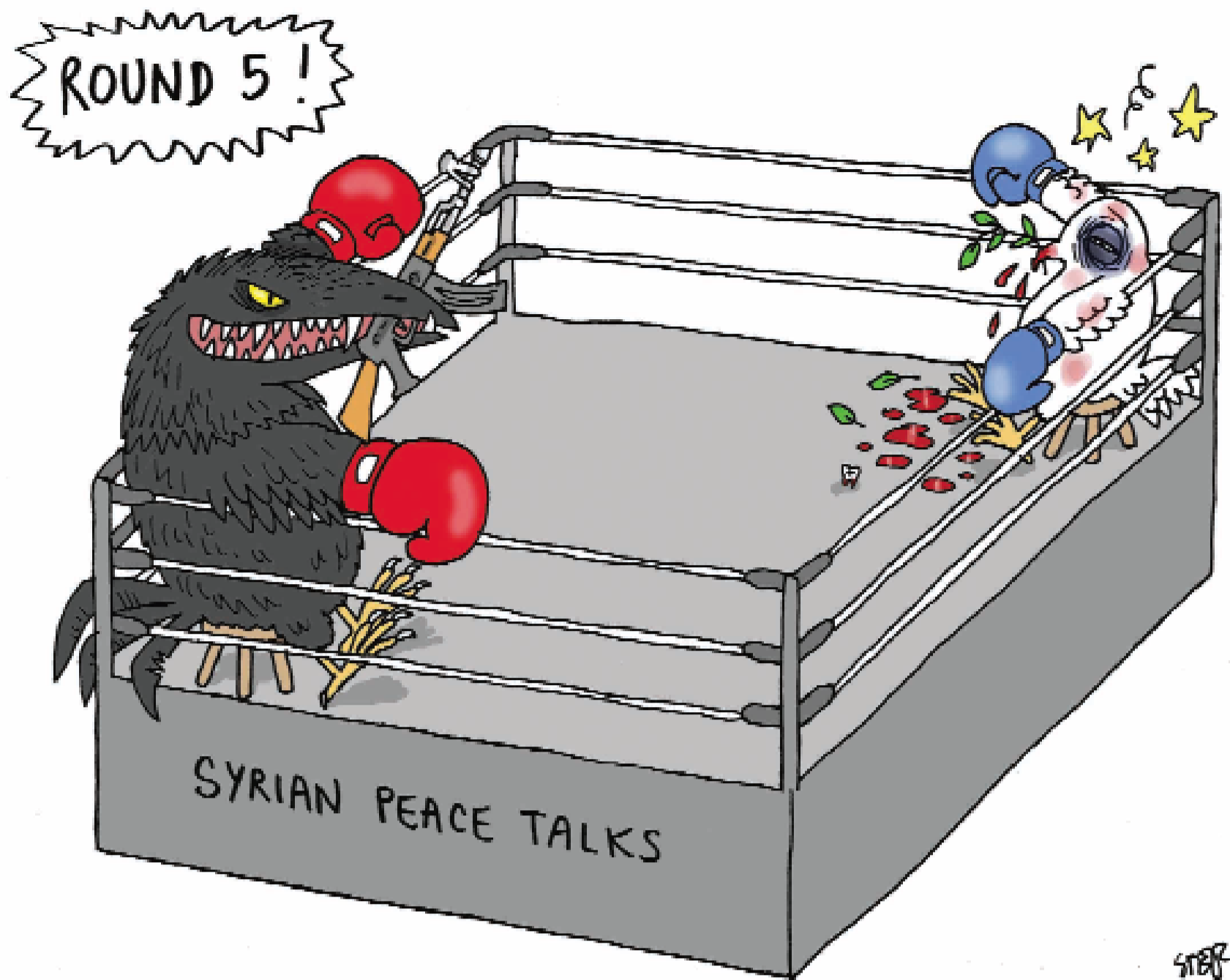
In 1994 when Baruch Goldstein, a young American-Israeli terrorist massacred 29 Muslim worshippers in a Hebron mosque, the Washington Post did a major feature piece trying to understand what happened to turn the young man to violence. The faces, names, and ages of the Palestinian victims never made it into print. Goldstein was the story; his victims were invisible. A few years later a 3-month Israeli baby was murdered by a Palestinian sniper. The story was front page news for three days with pictures and interviews with the weeping parents. When, just days later, a 3-day old Palestinian baby was murdered by an Israeli sniper - no major paper picked up the story. It was only reported on the seventh line of a short AP story. No name was given and the parents were not interviewed. It was as if their child and their pain did not matter.

Invisibility

Palestinian invisibility and/or objectification continues to define the conflict today. Even the most progressive voices in Congress don't speak about Palestinians. Instead they advocate for a "two state solution" to preserve Israel as a Jewish democratic state. A liberal pro-Israel group periodically puts full page ads in the New York Times and the Washington Post calling for two states, making the obscene argument of the demographic threat to the Israel's Jewishness posed by the Palestinian birthrate.

Unfortunately, oftentimes progressives unconsciously contribute to this by failing to elevate Palestinian humanity. Their efforts focus on condemning Israeli policies (which, no doubt, deserve condemnation), calling for boycotts, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) against the State of Israel. While I support BDS, I fear that at times the case for BDS is made without telling the personal stories of Palestinian victims of occupation. Instead of elevating Palestinians, punishing Israel becomes the goal.

NOTE: Dr James J Zogby is the President of the Arab American Institute



HOW REPUBLICANS CAN HOBBLE OBAMACARE

Republicans may have failed to overthrow Obamacare this week, but there are plenty of ways they can chip away at it. The Trump administration has already begun using its regulatory authority to water down less prominent aspects of the 2010 healthcare law. Earlier this week, newly confirmed Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price stalled the rollout of mandatory Medicare payment reform programs for heart attack treatment, bypass surgery and joint replacements finalized by the Obama administration in December.

The delays offer a glimpse at how President Donald Trump can use his administrative power to undercut aspects of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), including the insurance exchanges and Medicaid expansion that Republicans had sought to overturn. The Republicans' failure to repeal Obamacare, at least for now, means it remains federal law. Price's power resides in how to interpret that law, and which programs to emphasize and fund. Hospitals and physician groups have been counting on support from Medicare - the federal insurance program for the elderly and disabled - to continue driving payment reform policies built into Obamacare that reward doctors and hospitals for providing high quality care at a lower cost.

The Obama Administration had committed to shifting half of all Medicare payments to these alternative payment models by 2018. Although he has voiced general support for innovative payment programs, Price has been a loud critic of mandatory federal programs that dictate how doctors should deliver healthcare. Providers such as Dr Richard Gillilan, chief executive of Trinity Healthcare, a \$15.9 billion Catholic health system, say they will press on with these alternative payment plans with or without the government's blessing. But they have been actively lobbying Trump officials for support, according to interviews with more than a dozen hospital executives, physicians and policy experts.

Without the backing of Medicare, the biggest payer in the US healthcare system which Price now oversees, the nascent payment reform movement could lose momentum, sidelining a transformation many experts believe is vital to reining in runaway US healthcare spending. Price "can't change the legislation, but of course he's supposed to implement it. He could impact it," said John Rother, chief executive of the National Coalition on Health Care, a broad alliance of healthcare stakeholders that has been lobbying the new administration for support of value-based care.

The move Friday to pull the Republican bill only reinforces the risk to the existing law, which Trump said on Friday "will soon explode". "It seems that the Trump Administration now faces a choice whether to actively

undermine the ACA or reshape it administratively," Larry Levitt, senior vice president at Kaiser Family Foundation, wrote on Twitter. "The ACA marketplaces weren't collapsing, but they could be made to collapse through administrative actions," he added.

New Payment Plans at Risk

The United States spends \$3 trillion a year on healthcare - more by far than 10 other wealthy countries - yet has the lowest life expectancy and the highest infant mortality rate, according to a 2013 Commonwealth Fund report. Health costs have soared thanks in part to the traditional way doctors and hospitals get paid, namely by receiving a fee for

each service they provide. So the more advanced imaging tests a doctor orders or pricey procedures they perform, the more money he or she makes, regardless of whether the patient's health improves. "We have a completely broken economy in healthcare," said Blair Childs, senior vice president at hospital purchasing group Premier Inc. "Literally, all of the incentives in fee-for-service are for higher cost." Alternative payment models are designed to remove incentives that reward overtreatment of patients. Private insurers are on board, with Aetna Inc, Anthem Inc, UnitedHealth Group and most Blue Cross insurers announcing plans to shift half of their reimbursement to alternative payment models to control costs. — Reuters

APPROVAL OF KEYSTONE
HEADACHE FOR TRUDEAU

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was quick to welcome Washington's approval Friday of a major new pipeline from Canada into the United States, but observers say it creates political headaches for his administration. Trudeau has sought to strike a balance between two competing policies - supporting Canada's oil and gas sector, which is the sixth largest in the world, and slashing global-warming greenhouse gases.

In approving the Keystone XL pipeline - which would move oil from landlocked Alberta, Canada to US Gulf Coast refineries - US President Donald Trump reversed his predecessor Barack Obama's decision to block it two years ago. The project had first been proposed in 2008. In doing so, Trump has reignited a nearly decade-long feud between environmental activists and the energy industry, leaving Trudeau squeezed in the middle.

"I think Trump's decision hurts

the Trudeau government," Matthew Hoffmann, co-director of the Munk School's Environmental Governance Lab in Toronto told AFP. "I think they would have been happy to let Keystone die because of the US and not have to pay the political costs for its approval." Trudeau's centrist Liberal government remains high in the polls, but critics have highlighted his conflicting climate and economic policies to try to pry open cracks in his armor.

On the one hand he has spoken enthusiastically about the need to stem global warming, but he also recently approved two new domestic pipelines. It's an awkward position that Trudeau has "desperately clung to," said energy specialist Pierre-Olivier Pineau of HEC school in Montreal. The approval of the Keystone pipeline, the first and most favored of projects touted by the industry, will however help to shore up his support on the center-right. And it will help a political ally - a

fledgling progressive government in Alberta led by Rachel Notley. Her New Democrats swept to power for the first time ever in 2015 after four decades of conservative rule.

Oil Sector is Gushing

The Canadian oil and gas sector is naturally pleased about the decision. Alberta's oil has long been discounted \$5-\$10 below market values because there had been no way to get it to tidewater, leaving the United States as its sole buyer. Keystone is expected to carry 830,000 barrels of oil per day, allowing Canada to significantly boost energy exports and demand a better price. This would bring higher oil royalties and tax revenues at a crucial time when Ottawa is struggling with a large deficit, said Jean Thomas Bernard, an economics professor at the University of Ottawa. The oil sector had been Canada's top economic driver for years but was hit hard by the oil slump and 2016 wildfires. — AFP

WILL JACKSON STAY ON THE \$20 BILL?

US President Donald Trump's enthusiasm for his 19th century predecessor Andrew Jackson is stoking fears he may cancel plans to replace that controversial president on the \$20 bill with abolitionist Harriet Tubman. The Treasury Department announced a year ago that by 2020 it would remove slave-owner Jackson's likeness in favor of an image of Tubman, an African-American who escaped from slavery and helped others to freedom on the Underground Railroad.

Tubman, who also fought for women to be granted the right to vote, would be the first African-American as well as the first woman to appear on a US banknote. With nine billion in circulation, the \$20 bill is among the most widely used denomination along with \$1 bills, which number 11.7 billion. During the administration of president Barack Obama, the Treasury conducted a survey on who should be the first woman to appear on the currency, and selected Tubman.

Another survey by "Women on 20s," a group calling for a woman to appear on the \$20 banknote, collected more than a half-million responses in an online poll in which Tubman was first out of four finalists, including civil rights icon Rosa Parks and stateswoman and first lady Eleanor Roosevelt. But since Trump's election, Andrew Jackson's stock has risen strikingly

in the White House, a development that worries Tubman supporters.

Displayed in the Oval Office

"We are keeping a very close eye as to any further signal and any delay or change in the progress towards having design and production ready for Harriet Tubman on

the \$20 bill by 2020," Women on 20s Founder Barbara Ortiz told AFP. Trump "seems to be using every opportunity to extol the virtues of Jackson," she said, recalling was Jackson's a slave owner and his role in the "Trail of Tears". Jackson oversaw the start of forcible expulsions of Native Americans from their ancestral lands



US Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew looks at a rendering of Harriet Tubman during a visit to the Bureau of Engraving and Printing in Washington in this April 21, 2016 photo. — AFP

in the southeastern United States to areas west of the Mississippi River, resulting in thousands of deaths from starvation, exposure and disease.

As a military officer, Jackson also led an invasion of Spanish Florida to destroy the "Negro Fort," where former slaves had settled. Five days after his inauguration, Trump displayed Jackson's portrait prominently in the Oval Office, drawing inspiration from the former army commander, who was famed for his success in battle against the British and seen as a "man of the people"; Trump's advisor Stephen Bannon also praised Trump's inaugural address as "very Jacksonian".

Last week, Trump laid a wreath by Jackson's tomb at his former Tennessee plantation, marking the 250th anniversary of his birth. Trump praised the "very great" Jackson for taking on "an arrogant elite". "Does that sound familiar to you?" Trump asked. When Tubman's selection was announced during his campaign, Trump panned the choice as "purely politically correct", and said Tubman's picture would be better placed on the \$2 bill, which is hardly used. The Treasury Department declined to comment.

Before his departure, former Treasury secretary Jack Lew considered unveiling the new bill's design publicly to help make the change irreversible. — AFP

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