

Israel: Netanyahu threatens war on Iran, spurns “two-state solution”

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Sworn in Tuesday as prime minister in the most right-wing government in Israel's history, Benjamin Netanyahu threatened a military strike against Iran and signaled a break with the so-called "two-state solution" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict backed by Washington.

Netanyahu took office at the head of a fractious coalition after weeks of political horse-trading. The February 10 election in Israel gave Netanyahu's Likud party one less seat in the Knesset than the Kadima party of outgoing Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Tzipi Livni, the former foreign minister and the party's candidate. Nonetheless, Netanyahu was tapped to form the government because Likud and other parties on the right of the Israeli political spectrum dominate the Knesset.

Netanyahu's principal political ally in the new government is Israel Beiteinu, a far-right split-off from Likud led by Avigdor Lieberman, a former Moldovan nightclub bouncer who advances a semi-fascist program promoting the wholesale ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from both Israel and the West Bank. Lieberman has become foreign minister and Israel's face to the world. The party has also been given control of public security, somewhat ironic given that Lieberman is under multiple police investigations on charges of taking bribes.

The Knesset voted 69-45 for the new government, with five members of the Labor Party abstaining. Later, five MPs of the United Torah Judaism party joined the coalition, giving it the backing of 74 of the Knesset's 120 members.

Labor joined the coalition at the insistence of Ehud Barak, who will retain his position as defense minister, with the party picking up three other cabinet portfolios: industry, trade and labor. The party was bitterly divided over entering the government, with the losing faction warning that it would spell the end of Labor, erasing its last pretense of representing some kind of social democratic alternative to the Israeli right. Nonetheless, none of its members voted against the new government.

The government will be the largest in Israel's history, with Netanyahu naming 30 ministers and 7 deputy ministers in order to placate the parties making up his coalition with posts. Livni mocked the new government for its "ministers of nothing," while warning that under conditions of "a profound financial

and social crisis," the Israeli public "will have to carry the enormous weight of a bloated cabinet."

Livni nonetheless declared her desire to "see the new government succeed" and made no criticism of the policies of the new government.

Netanyahu and Lieberman wasted no time in spelling out the reactionary and bellicose character of these policies.

In an interview with Jonah Goldberg of the *Atlantic* just before his swearing-in, Netanyahu issued an explicit threat of an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear program, warning that if Washington failed to stop it by means of diplomatic pressure, Israel would take military action.

According to Goldberg, Netanyahu told him that the Obama administration "must stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons—and quickly—or an imperiled Israel may be forced to attack Iran's nuclear facilities itself."

He described the Iranian government as a "messianic apocalyptic cult" and Iran itself as "a country that glorifies blood and death, including its own self-immolation." This provocative language is designed to demonize the entire Iranian people and justify mass killing.

Goldberg quoted one of Netanyahu's military advisers as asserting that Israel could act "within months" and was capable of carrying out the attack with or without Washington's approval. "The problem is not military capability, the problem is whether you have the stomach, the political will, to take action," one adviser said.

The Israeli threats were echoed Wednesday by General David Petraeus, head of the US Central Command, who told a congressional committee that "the Israeli government may ultimately see itself so threatened by the prospect of an Iranian nuclear weapon that it would take preemptive military action to derail or delay it."

Meanwhile, in a speech to the Israeli parliament shortly before he was sworn in as prime minister Tuesday, Netanyahu gave a clear indication that he has no intention of pursuing negotiations aimed at creating an independent Palestinian state.

"We do not want to rule the Palestinians," he said. "Under the final accord, the Palestinians will have all the rights to govern themselves, except those that can put in danger the security and the existence of Israel."

He said he would promote an "economic peace" plan spurring investments in the West Bank economy and declared his support for US efforts to train the Palestinian Authority's security forces.

In other words, Israeli policy is to maintain its domination over the occupied territories, while relying on the Palestinian Authority's forces to suppress resistance and utilizing the Palestinian population as cheap labor for Israeli industry. The viability of this last aim, however, is largely precluded by the maintenance of roadblocks, security fences and a generalized crackdown against the Palestinian population that cripples the movement of materials, goods and labor.

Lieberman was more explicit in his rejection of the so-called two-state solution. At an official ceremony in Jerusalem on Wednesday, he declared that the statement signed by the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority at the US-sponsored Annapolis Conference of 2007 "has no validity" because it had not been ratified by the Knesset. The conference marked the first time that Israel committed itself to bilateral negotiations with the aim of creating an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.

In a television interview following the speech, Lieberman stressed that he had chosen his words to provide "an expression of a change in Israel's policy regarding the peace process."

The Israeli daily *Haaretz* quoted an official in Netanyahu's Likud party as saying that the new government "intended to distance itself from US-sponsored understandings on working towards a Palestinian state."

Nonetheless, Washington sought to dismiss Lieberman's statements, while affirming its continued support for Israeli, a state that it subsidizes with \$3 billion in military aid every year.

US President Barack Obama called Wednesday to congratulate Netanyahu on his assumption of power and as *Haaretz* reported, to "reaffirm steadfast US commitment to Israel and its security." In the half-hour conversation, Obama "said he looked forward to working closely with Prime Minister Netanyahu and his government to address issues of mutual concern, including Iran and Arab-Israeli peace," according to a White House statement.

Meanwhile, *Haaretz* reported last Sunday that the transition period has been utilized by Zionist settlers on the West Bank to step up construction activity, further whittling away and dividing the land controlled by Palestinians.

Citing the non-profit organization Yesh Din, the paper pointed to the "extensive earthworks being carried out in preparation for the construction of a road connecting the settlement of Eli, north of Ramallah, with the Hayovel outpost Yuval, just south of the Arab city." More than 90 percent of the road is being built on land owned by Palestinians.

In a similar project, settlers at the Havat Gilad outpost, west of Nablus, have built a road to the Nablus bypass road.

The report follows the recent revelation that, as part of their coalition agreement, Netanyahu and Lieberman struck a secret

deal to press ahead with the so-called E1 project that would build 3,000 new housing units adjacent to the West Bank settlement of Ma'aleh Adumin, effectively linking it with Jerusalem and further bisecting the north of the West Bank from the south.

Earlier proposals for the project had been condemned by the Bush administration and Condoleezza Rice, its secretary of state, as being "at odds with American policy."

These "facts on the ground" are aimed at rendering even a truncated Palestinian mini-state an impossibility.

Meanwhile in Gaza, shattered by the 23-day Israeli offensive that claimed the lives of over 1,400 Palestinians, fighting continues with the Israeli Defense Forces killing three people Tuesday in what it claimed was an attack on armed militants.

All of the major Israeli parties backed the murderous assault on Gaza—Olmert took credit for it in his farewell address, while proclaiming the IDF the most "moral" army in the world. Both Netanyahu and Lieberman, however, criticized the outgoing government for failing to continue the assault until the Hamas administration in Gaza had been overthrown, a policy that strongly suggests Israeli aggression will be redoubled in the coming weeks and months.

Meanwhile, Israel's economy is increasingly battered by the world crisis, with thousands of workers being laid off and the country's high-tech sector particularly hard hit. Social polarization—already among the most intense in the world—is deepening. The new government is taking office committed to cutting budgets and wages, while it is debating a scheme to bail out the speculative investments of the country's billionaire tycoons with public funds.

This objective situation and the reactionary policies of Netanyahu, in which militarist aggression will be joined by attacks on the social conditions of the working class in Israel itself, ensures that the new government will be one of extreme crisis and instability.



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