

# Netanyahu begins post-election maneuvers, in Israel and abroad

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20 March 2015

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sought to soft-pedal the anti-Arab racism of his last-ditch election appeals, in interviews Thursday with two US broadcast networks, MSNBC and Fox News. He gave the interviews as talks continued in Jerusalem on the formation of a new coalition government, expected to be led by Netanyahu's Likud Party.

Speaking to MSNBC anchor Andrea Mitchell Thursday morning, Netanyahu denied that he had reversed a previous commitment to the eventual establishment of a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, although he did so categorically in the final days of the election campaign.

With the last polls, conducted five days before the March 17 election, showing that he would likely trail the opposition Zionist Union by four seats or more, Netanyahu embarked on a campaign blitz to convince the supporters of other right-wing and religious parties to switch their votes to Likud.

He disavowed his 2009 agreement to support a "two-state solution," declaring categorically that there would never be a Palestinian state as long as he was prime minister. He reiterated this statement at rallies Monday and again on election day, when he combined it with an appeal for right-wing voters to go to the polls to counter Israeli Arab voters who were turning out "in droves."

The appeals had their effect. While the overall vote for the three far-right parties remained roughly the same—43 seats in the last election in 2013, 44 seats on Tuesday—the distribution of seats within the right-wing bloc changed dramatically. In 2013, Likud won 20 seats, while its right-wing allies won 23. In 2015, Likud's share rose to 30, six seats more than the second-place Zionist Union, making Netanyahu the frontrunner to be named prime minister for a fourth time.

For his American television appearances, Netanyahu dropped the howls that "the Arabs are coming" and

reavowed his support for a Palestinian state, albeit so hedged with conditions that the pledge was meaningless. He told Mitchell, "I don't want a one-state solution. I want a sustainable, peaceful two-state solution. But for that, circumstances have to change."

Asked directly about his warnings of a high Arab turnout, Netanyahu simply denied he was making a racist appeal. "I'm very proud to be the prime minister of all of Israel's citizens, Arabs and Jews alike," he told NBC, without provoking any further questioning.

In an interview broadcast later on Fox, he elaborated on this denial, saying, "I wasn't trying to suppress a vote; I was trying to get out my vote." That he was trying to "get out my vote" through a brazen appeal to anti-Arab racism is obvious, so his Fox interviewer, Megyn Kelly, dropped the subject.

Netanyahu told Kelly that he could resume talks with the Palestinian Authority only if the Fatah-led government on the West Bank broke its unity agreement with Hamas and agreed to negotiate separately with Israel. "You have to get the international community to press on the Palestinians to go back on their unity pact with the terrorist Hamas and come back to the table," he said.

Netanyahu was seeking to preempt the possibility of any diplomatic blowback against the Israeli government for his openly saying during the final days of the election campaign what has been obvious throughout his term in office: Israel's participation in peace talks with the Palestinian Authority is a charade, staged only to please its US paymasters as well as to retain the services of the corrupt PA apparatus in policing the population of the West Bank.

The Obama administration reacted angrily to Netanyahu's dropping the pretense of peace talks for the sake of his reelection campaign. White House officials suggested that the US might drop its blanket opposition to pro-Palestinian resolutions at the UN Security Council,

where the US has used its veto power incessantly to block condemnation of Israeli war crimes like last year's onslaught on Gaza.

One "senior administration official" was widely quoted in the American press, to the effect that "The positions taken by the prime minister in the last days of the campaign have raised very significant substantive questions that go far beyond just optics."

The official singled out Netanyahu's admission during a campaign rally at Har Homa that the settlement had been built on Arab land to create a separation between East Jerusalem and the Arab town of Bethlehem. "To actually come out and say that this construction is actually driven by efforts to undermine a future Palestinian state is fairly dramatic," said the official.

The divisions between Netanyahu and the Obama administration that emerged in the run-up to the election—which centered on US efforts to bring Iran into its overall imperialist strategy in the Middle East—continue in its aftermath. The AP reported on Thursday that the US and Iran have drafted elements of a deal over nuclear power and sanctions that they are seeking to finalize by the end of the month. Netanyahu has bitterly opposed such a deal, which would undermine Israel's influence in the Middle East.

As for the issue of a future Palestinian state, the main concern of the Obama administration is that Netanyahu's comments reveal, all too bluntly, the implacable commitment of the Israeli government to depriving the Arab population, both on the West Bank and Gaza and within Israel itself, of democratic rights and any possibility of economic improvement. This creates political dangers for ongoing US military operations in Syria and Iraq, which depend on Arab bases and participation by the military forces of Arab states.

Successive US governments, both Republican and Democratic, have backed Israeli-Palestinian talks based on a "two-state" approach, not out of any sympathy for the Palestinian population living under Israeli military occupation, but to provide political cover for the reactionary Arab rulers, in Gulf states, Egypt, Iraq, etc., who are the stooges and client states of American imperialism in the region.

The creation of a rump Palestinian state under the domination of Zionism and imperialism would represent not a step forward for the Palestinian masses, but a new and dangerous trap. Netanyahu opposes such a state only to pursue an even more reactionary policy, the expansion of Israeli sovereignty to cover the entire region from the

Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, which would lead inexorably to the expulsion—or extermination—of the Palestinian Arab population.

Netanyahu made his "clarification" on a Palestinian state in response to concerns raised by the European imperialist powers as well. France, Germany and Britain all reiterated their support for a "two-state" solution, in response to his statements at the end of the Israeli election campaign. British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, leader of the Liberal Party, went so far as to warn Netanyahu that the British parliament would undoubtedly vote to recognize the Palestinian Authority as a state with authority over the West Bank and Gaza if the Israeli leader did not reverse himself.

For the leadership of the Palestinian Authority, Netanyahu's comments were something of a windfall, enabling it to bolster its campaign to win recognition of a Palestinian state through diplomatic machinations in the United Nations. "We will continue a diplomatic intifada. We have no other choice," one Palestinian official told the *New York Times*. This is a particularly obscene formulation, equating as it does the squalid backroom maneuvers at the UN with the struggle of thousands of Palestinian youth and workers who engaged in mass rebellion against the Israeli occupation.

In Jerusalem, the six parties expected to form the next Israeli government were in talks on the distribution of cabinet positions, with the biggest fight over control of the defense ministry, where Naftali Bennett, head of the ultra-right settlers' party Jewish Home was said to be the most likely candidate. Moshe Kahlon, head of the newly formed Kulanu Party, second largest in the coalition, was expected to be named either finance minister or head of an expanded ministry with control over all budgetary matters.



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