

# Trump taps right-wing supporter of settlers as ambassador to Israel

Bill Van Auken  
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In yet another appointment defining the extreme right-wing character of his incoming administration, president-elect Donald Trump has named New York bankruptcy attorney David M. Friedman as his choice for US ambassador to Israel.

With no diplomatic or political experience whatsoever, Friedman's apparent qualifications for what has long been considered one of Washington's most important diplomatic postings appear to be: (1) his having helped Trump reap tens of millions off of the multiple bankruptcies of his Atlantic City casinos; and (2) his raising of tens of millions to support one of the most right-wing religious Zionist settlements in the occupied West Bank.

"Based on statements he has issued and columns he has penned, Friedman is positioned on the far right of the Israeli political map—more hard-line in his views than Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu," the Israeli daily *Haaretz* commented in its article on the appointment.

"The bond between Israel and the United States runs deep, and I will ensure there is no daylight between us when I'm president," Trump said in a statement announcing the appointment. "As the United States ambassador to Israel, David Friedman will maintain the special relationship between our two countries."

In reality, the naming of Friedman as US ambassador is the equivalent of an open US declaration of war against the Palestinian people and a signal that, under a Trump presidency, Washington will give up even the pretense of opposing the expansion of Israeli settlements and the outright annexation of the occupied West Bank. It signals open and unconditional support to every measure taken by the Israeli government to drive the Palestinians from their land, destroy their homes, deprive them of even minimal democratic rights

and brutally suppress every manifestation of resistance.

In response to the nomination, Friedman issued a statement saying that he looked forward to doing his job "from the US embassy in Israel's eternal capital, Jerusalem."

For more than six decades, US administrations, Democratic and Republican alike, have kept the US embassy in Tel Aviv, along with those of every other country that maintains diplomatic relations with the Israeli state. Under international law, Israel's annexation of occupied East Jerusalem following the 1967 Six-Day War is considered illegal, and the official US position has been that the city's status must be resolved as part of a comprehensive peace agreement.

While Zionist settlements in the occupied West Bank are also a violation of international law, Trump's nomination of Friedman is an unmistakable declaration of full support to their unbridled expansion.

Friedman is the president of a group called American Friends of Bet El Yeshiva, which funnels tens of millions of dollars to an illegal settlement established by right-wing religious Zionists on stolen Palestinian private land near Ramallah.

Among those providing funding for this group are the parents of Jared Kushner, Donald Trump's son-in-law, who reportedly will play a significant role in the incoming administration. Jared Kushner is a member of the board of his parents' foundation that has donated to American Friends of Bet El Yeshiva. The Kushner foundation has also provided funding for the Gush Etzion, a complex of 14 Zionist settlements, whose expansion has been formally condemned by the US State Department as threatening to upend any possibility of a peace settlement based on the so-called "two-state solution."

Friedman, who has written as a columnist for *Arutz*

*Sheva*, the media outlet of the settler movement, as well as for the right-wing *Jerusalem Post*, has consistently rejected the illegality of Zionist settlement activity and has called for an end to any restrictions on construction of new settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

In one of his columns, Friedman accused President Obama of “appealing to the vilest anti-Semitic biases of the population.”

He has also denounced in the most vitriolic terms any Jewish groups voicing opposition to the policies of the right-wing Israeli government. In another column for *Arutz Sheva*, he characterized the liberal Zionist lobby J Street as “far worse than kapos—Jews who turned in their fellow Jews in the Nazi death camps.”

During the Trump campaign, Friedman served as an emissary to Jewish voters, particularly among Americans living in Israel. Friedman spoke out against those calling attention to the role in the campaign of fascistic elements like Breitbart chief Stephen Bannon, the president-elect’s chief strategist, and their ties to openly anti-Semitic groups. “The danger in the US is on the left, not on the right,” Friedman told Israeli television. “I’m not saying that there aren’t neo-Nazis floating around in the United States, because I’m sure there are. But the movement we ought to be concerned about is on the left.”

The Israeli right has hailed Friedman’s nomination. Likud Party Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely “welcomed” his appointment on her Facebook page, calling it “good news for Israel.”

“His positions encapsulate the desire to strengthen the status of Israel’s capital, Jerusalem, and the understanding that settlements have never been the real problem in the region,” Hotovely said.

Similarly, Education Minister Naftali Bennett of the Jewish Home party, a right-wing political rival of Netanyahu, described Friedman as “a great friend of Israel.”

Meanwhile, Saeb Erekat, secretary-general of the Palestine Liberation Organization, warned that the policies advocated by Friedman “will be the destruction of the peace process.”

“I look David Friedman and Trump in the eye and tell them—if you were to take these steps of moving the embassy and annexing settlements in the West Bank, you are sending this region down the path of something

that I call chaos, lawlessness and extremism,” he said.

Expressing the deep conservatism and subservience to imperialism of the Palestinian bourgeois leadership, Erekat added that he didn’t believe the Trump administration would pursue such policies because, “The United States at the end of the day is a country of institutions, and they are guided by their national interests.”

There were also warnings from former Israeli officials about the dangers involved in appointing Friedman.

“If an American ambassador stakes out positions that further embolden an already triumphalist settler elite, then that is likely to cause headaches for American national security interests across the region and even for Israel’s own security establishment,” Daniel Levy, a former Israeli peace negotiator told the *New York Times*. “Especially an ambassador committed to the ill-advised relocation of the US embassy to Jerusalem.”

The concern within these circles is that Washington’s renunciation of the pretense of peace negotiations and a two-state solution and its open embrace of the Israeli occupation will not only further stoke hostility to US imperialism throughout the Middle East, but will also lead to the collapse of the Palestinian Authority, to which the US and Israel have contracted out much of the policing of the Palestinian population in the West Bank.

Amid widespread hostility to the PA among the West Bank Palestinians, a recent poll conducted in the area found that two-thirds of the Palestinian population already believes that the two-state solution is no longer viable, and a similar majority wants Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to resign.



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