

Israel presses settlement expansion, defies UN resolution

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Flatly defying last week's United Nations Security Council resolution, the Israeli government has announced that it will move ahead with thousands of new homes in East Jerusalem and elsewhere in the occupied West Bank territories seized by force nearly 50 years ago in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

Jerusalem's municipal government was expected to approve more than 600 housing units in East Jerusalem at a meeting today, in what the city's deputy mayor, who is in charge of the zoning authority, called a first installment on 5,600 new homes.

"We remain unfazed by the UN vote, or by any other entity that tries to dictate what we do in Jerusalem," Meir Turgeman told the *Israel Hayom* newspaper. "I hope the Israeli government and the new US administration will support us so we can make up for the lack [of construction] during the eight years of the Obama administration."

Despite this disparaging reference to Obama, the Zionist program of expansion in Palestinian territories moved ahead by leaps and bounds during his presidency. The Jewish population of East Jerusalem rose from 194,000 when Obama took office in 2009 to 208,000 by the end of 2014, an increase that is small only by comparison with the expansion of settlements in the West Bank proper, whose settler population skyrocketed from 297,000 to 386,000. The combined increase in the two areas is more than 100,000, nearly 21 percent.

The conflict between the Obama administration and the Netanyahu government has intensified throughout this period, with Washington clearly regarding its client state as engaging in unwarranted meddling in broader Middle East policy, particularly Netanyahu's vehement opposition to the nuclear agreement with Iran. The Israeli leader took the unprecedented step of going to Washington without a White House invitation and addressing a joint session of Congress to declare his

hostility to the deal.

Last week, the US ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, abstained rather than vetoing a Security Council resolution criticizing Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem as obstacles to a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. It was the first time since 1979 that the UN Security Council adopted a resolution critical of Israeli settlement policy. Every attempt since then has been blocked by a US veto.

Despite the subsequent furor, Resolution 2334 is completely toothless, lacking any enforcement mechanism. If Clinton rather than Trump were preparing to assume the presidency, there is little doubt that the White House would have instructed Power to veto the resolution. The abstention is a cynical effort to posture as evenhanded under conditions where Washington remains the principal financial, military and diplomatic sponsor of Israeli aggression and oppression of the Palestinians.

The Netanyahu government responded to the passage of the resolution, by a 14-0 vote with only the US abstaining, by immediately downgrading diplomatic relations with 12 of the countries voting for it. Two more, Venezuela and Malaysia, have no diplomatic ties with Israel.

Israeli officials summoned the ambassadors of the 12 countries for a tongue-lashing by Netanyahu, including the representatives of such powers as Russia, China, Britain, France, Japan and Spain. Netanyahu also cancelled a scheduled visit by the prime minister of Ukraine and summoned home Israeli ambassadors to Senegal and New Zealand, two of the resolution's cosponsors.

Netanyahu and his ambassador to Washington, former Republican Party operative Ron Dermer, went further in assailing the Obama administration, declaring that the US State Department had actually engineered the resolution and insured its passage, and claiming that they had "nonpublic information" to prove the charge. Dermer said

he would share this evidence with the new US administration after Donald Trump becomes president on January 20.

In his formal statement, Netanyahu declared, “The Obama administration not only failed to protect Israel against this gang-up at the UN, it colluded with it behind the scenes,” adding, “Israel looks forward to working with President-elect Trump and with all our friends in Congress, Republicans and Democrats alike, to negate the harmful effects of this absurd resolution.”

The extraordinary and unprecedented vitriol of Netanyahu’s attacks on Obama, despite the token character of the UN resolution, can only mean that he knows he has the support of the incoming administration for a major shift in policy toward the Palestinians living in the occupied territories. Netanyahu has been under increasing pressure from ultranationalist elements among the settlers, spearheaded by his coalition partner Naftali Bennett of the Jewish Home party, who are demanding the outright annexation of large portions of the West Bank, scrapping the pretense of a “two-state solution” in which the Palestinian Authority would become the internationally recognized government of a West Bank puppet state.

In the American media, this new direction was indicated in an op-ed column in the *Wall Street Journal* by John Bolton, the UN Ambassador during the George W. Bush administration who is a foreign policy adviser to Trump and may obtain a top position in the new administration. He claimed that the “two-state solution” was dead as of January 20 and should be replaced by what he called a “three-state solution,” in which Gaza was turned over to the Egyptian military dictatorship, parts of the West Bank were turned over to Jordan, and the rest annexed to Israel. Bolton did not spell out the fate of the Palestinians in the annexed territory, but Israeli extremists have called for their outright expulsion to Jordan or other Arab countries.

Trump has selected as the next US ambassador to Israel an individual very much in sympathy with such plans for a form of “ethnic cleansing” on the West Bank. David Friedman is the real estate billionaire’s personal bankruptcy lawyer. He has no diplomatic experience, but a long record as a fundraiser for West Bank settlements. Friedman has repeatedly denounced the “two-state” solution and advocated moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, something Trump has pledged to do as president.

Such a shift in policy would find widespread support in the US political establishment among Democrats as well

as Republicans. Fully one-third of the Democratic caucus in the Senate—15 out of 45—have already sided with Netanyahu and Trump against the refusal of the Obama administration to veto the UN resolution.

Topping the list was the incoming minority leader, Charles Schumer, joined by Robert Casey of Pennsylvania, Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, Corey Booker of New Jersey, Sherrod Brown of Ohio, Mark Warner of Virginia and nine others. Only two Democratic senators issued statements supporting the administration.

Trump spelled out his opposition to Obama’s refusal to veto the UN resolution in a Twitter statement warning that US policy would change after January 20. This follows a pattern since the election, in which Trump has broken radically with the tradition that the President-elect avoids public clashes with the White House, particularly on foreign policy, based on the maxim that the United States has “one president at a time.”

Besides repudiating Obama’s actions on Israeli settlements, Trump has repudiated a 40-year-old policy on Taiwan, the “One China” policy that concedes Beijing’s sovereignty over the island, and he has effectively repudiated a decades-old US policy of reducing nuclear weapons stockpiles, indicating his desire to engage in a new arms race.

As with his pronouncements on China policy and nuclear weapons, Trump’s intervention into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has the most incendiary implications. The “two-state solution” was the preferred policy of American imperialism for many decades, not because it offered a viable alternative to the Palestinians, but because it was a necessary political cover for the reactionary Arab monarchies and military dictatorships allied with the United States.

The essence of the foreign policy of the billionaire Trump, the personification of the American financial oligarchy, is to dispense with such diplomatic maneuvers and formulations in favor of unbridled bullying and military violence carried out unilaterally by the United States against all of its foreign rivals. It is a formula that leads directly to regional wars—in the Middle East, in Africa, in the Far East—and ultimately to World War III.



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