

Paris conference pleads with Trump to continue Middle East “peace process”

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The Paris conference, called by the United Nations Security Council, bade a tacit farewell to the 1993 Oslo Accords that were meant to inaugurate a new era of peace with Israel through the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Delegates from more than 70 countries, including US Secretary of State John Kerry, recognised that there would be no similar conferences after the inauguration of Donald Trump as US president on Friday.

In a vacuous communiqué, they reaffirmed the illegality of Israel’s settlements on land occupied since 1967 and appealed to “both sides [to] officially restate their commitment to the two-state solution, thus disassociating themselves from voices that reject this solution.”

This was, as usual, framed as if both Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) were equally responsible for the absence of “peace.” Kerry had insisted that an earlier version of the communiqué be redrafted to include a condemnation of Palestinian attacks on Israel to ensure a more “balanced” resolution.

It also called for “meaningful direct negotiations” over borders, Jerusalem, security and the rights of Palestinian refugees of the 1948 and 1967 wars. There were no concrete proposals other than a reference to a “special privileged partnership” with Europe as an incentive to negotiate. Palestine Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is due to meet French President Francois Hollande later this week to discuss the communiqué.

The entire event was little more than a pathetic plea to Trump to continue with the peace process. This charade is seen as necessary political cover for the imperialist powers’ ongoing interventions in the Middle East—under conditions where the position of the US and its allies has been seriously weakened by the disastrous wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya and the debacle of the proxy war for regime change in Syria.

To this end, the event assumed the character of a public

recitation of the “two state” catechism over the burial of the Oslo Accords in advance of Trump’s inauguration. He has vowed to be “the most pro-Israel president in history” and is expected to provide strong support for the Greater Israel project and move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. He has even appointed Jared Kushner, his son-in-law, to impose a deal with the Palestinians on Israeli terms.

Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, emboldened by the prospect of a major shift in US policy, would have nothing to do with the Paris meeting and poured scorn on the whole event, calling it futile, rigged and “a relic.” He refused to be bound by its decisions, saying, “It’s a last gasp of the past before the future sets in... Tomorrow’s world will be different and it is very near.”

As the Israeli daily *Haaretz* noted, the statement was in fact “less harsh”—to Israel—than an earlier leaked draft. Like the UN Security Council resolution of last December opposing Israeli settlements, the declaration contains no sanctions against Israel if Netanyahu does not end settlement construction and the brutal oppression of Palestinians.

That earlier resolution had marked an attempt by Washington—which, contrary to its usual practice, did not use its veto to protect Israel but abstained—to warn that formally abandoning the “two state solution”, implicit in the settlement project, would harm both Israeli and American interests in the region.

Only the most deluded can have failed to note that the so-called peace process has been comatose for years, with the last face-to-face talks between Israel, the most powerful-armed force in the Middle East, and the PA, bankrupt and indigent, taking place nearly three years ago and lasting a few hours.

At issue has been the continual expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which

make a contiguous mini-state of Palestine impossible. Washington, Israel's paymaster and protector, has never seriously challenged Tel Aviv's expansionist policy. In 2011, the US again vetoed a UN Security Council resolution declaring all settlements illegal. Since then, the number of settlers in the West Bank alone has risen by 100,000.

The Obama administration has supported Israel's blockade of Gaza, backed its murderous assaults on Gaza in 2012 and 2014 and signed a massive 10-year \$3.8 billion military aid package. Secretary of State Kerry even called Netanyahu on Sunday to promise him that the conference would lead to no further action at the UN or in any other international forum.

French President Francois Hollande's purpose in convening the conference, the second in less than a year, was to pose as a friend to the Palestinian people under conditions where his forces are playing an escalating role in military operations in the Middle East and North Africa. Hollande opened the conference saying, "The two-state solution, which the international community has agreed on for many years, appears threatened.

"It is physically threatened on the ground by the acceleration of settlements, it is politically threatened by the progressive weakening of the peace camp, it is morally threatened by the distrust that has accumulated between the parties, and that has certainly been exploited by extremists," he continued.

This hypocrisy came from a man whose government banned demonstrations in solidarity with the Palestinians during Israel's 2014 assault on Gaza, which left more than 2,200 Palestinians, including more than 550 children, dead. Last November, the French air force carried out military exercises with Israeli warplanes over Corsica, presaging joint military operations around the world.

The Paris conference comes in the wake of the toothless UN Security Council resolution and Kerry's follow-up speech, reiterating all the nostrums about US support for the two state solution and opposing Israeli intransigence, which Netanyahu vociferously opposed.

While the purpose of the conference was to warn Trump about the consequences of too closely embracing Israel, it refrained from criticising his suggestion that he will move the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, even though the overwhelming majority of the delegates spoke to oppose the move. They fear widespread popular opposition will inflame the Middle East.

The conference also revealed growing divisions within Europe, with Britain and some central European states

anxious not to upset the incoming Trump administration. British Prime Minister Theresa May sees the cultivation of economic and political relations with the US through Trump as essential—post-Brexit—in countering the loss of relations with Europe. She broke ranks and sent only an observer. The Foreign Office Spokesperson cited "reservations" over holding such a conference without Israeli or Palestinian representatives, "just days before the transition to a new American president when the US will be the ultimate guarantor of any agreement."

This follows May's criticism of Kerry's speech reaffirming US support for the two state solution and criticising Israeli intransigence of the settlements, despite Britain's role in drafting the UN resolution opposing the settlements and vote in favour of the resolution.

In a highly irregular move, Britain, along with Lithuania and Hungary, intervened to stop the European Union Foreign Affairs Council adopting the Paris communiqué. It follows an intervention by Trump who told the *Times on Sunday* that he expects Britain to oppose any future UN Security Council resolution against Israel.

Russia also only sent a low-level observer, as it hopes that a Trump presidency will be more amenable to a working relationship between Moscow and Washington.

The Paris meeting demonstrates the utter futility of seeking democratic and social justice for the Palestinian people through some filthy deal between the Palestinian bourgeoisie, the Israeli government and the reactionary Arab states. The burial of the peace process under the auspices of the Trump administration will strengthen the turn in Israel towards authoritarian and militaristic rule on behalf of a handful of corrupt oligarchs who dominate the political, economic and social life of the country, while further impoverishing Palestinian and Israeli workers alike.



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