Trump, Netanyahu dismiss “two-state solution,” threaten Iran

Bill Van Auken
16 February 2017

In a White House press conference Wednesday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, US President Donald Trump backed away from a decades-old pretense by Washington of a commitment to the pursuit of a “two-state solution” to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Instead, echoing remarks by Netanyahu, Trump advanced a “much bigger deal, a much more important deal” that “would take in many, many countries and…would cover a very large territory.” While vague in the extreme, in the context of the evolving foreign policy of the Trump administration, the statement suggested plans for a closer US-Israeli alliance of militarist aggression against Iran, combined with an attempt to bring Arab Sunni regimes such as Saudi Arabia, the other Gulf monarchies and others on board.

In the course of the 2016 election campaign, Trump vowed to become the “most pro-Israel president in history,” promised to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and followed up by naming his personal bankruptcy lawyer, David Friedman, a prominent US supporter of Zionist settlements in the occupied West Bank, as his nominee for US ambassador to Israel.

At Wednesday’s press conference, which was scheduled before he and Netanyahu met, thereby precluding any questions as to the content of their discussions, Trump indicated a significant shift from the public policy that has been put forward by Washington for decades: that the solution to the conflict in the Middle East required the creation of a Palestinian mini-state on at least some of the territory occupied by Israel since the 1967 war.

The pursuit of this supposed “solution” through so-called peace talks that invariably break down has been a longstanding charade, designed to portray Washington as some kind of even-handed broker even as it arms Israel to the teeth and subsidizes its economy. The continuous encroachment of settlements and security areas have long since reduced and divided the territory that would supposedly be ruled by a Palestinian state, rendering any such entity politically and economically unviable.

Nonetheless, Trump’s statement at the press conference that, as far as a two-state or one-state solution, “I could be happy with either one” is a signal to the Israeli government that it can proceed as it sees fit in the continued occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people without facing even the pretense of pressure from Washington.

Trump said Wednesday that he would “love to see” the US embassy moved to Jerusalem, but gave no indication that such a decision, which would spark intense hostility throughout the Arab world, was imminent.

On the issue of Israel’s settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Trump gave what might be best described as a “wink and a nod” to the Israeli prime minister, telling him, “I’d like to see you hold back on settlements for a little bit,” while adding, “We’ll work something out.” To laughter from the White House audience, he added, peering at Netanyahu, “both sides will have to make compromises--You know that, right?”

Earlier the administration had put forward a formal opposition to the creation of new settlements and the geographical expansion of existing ones, leaving open the building of new settler housing within those that already exist.

For his part, Netanyahu, who in the weeks following Trump’s inauguration approved plans for more than 3,000 new homes in West Bank settlements and East Jerusalem, made it clear that he was reading the green light from the White House. He dismissed the questions on settlements, saying that they were not the “core of the conflict,” and voiced confidence that he and Trump would “arrive at an understanding so we don't keep on bumping into each other all the time on this issue.”

Trump also denounced what he characterized as “one-sided actions against Israel at the United Nations, which has treated Israel in my opinion very, very unfairly.” Last December, then-president-elect Trump denounced the Obama administration for not using its veto in the UN Security Council to defeat a toothless resolution criticizing Israel’s expansion of settlements in the occupied territories.

© World Socialist Web Site

Both Trump and Netanyahu have promoted a conception that Israel was neglected and mistreated by the Obama administration. In point of fact, last September the Obama White House concluded a $38 billion, 10-year arms aid deal with Tel Aviv, the largest such agreement in history, expanding on the massive US assistance to the Israel, a country which takes in roughly one third of all US aid worldwide, while accounting for just .001 percent of the world's population.

The reaction of the Israeli right to the press conference was ecstatic. Naftali Bennett, Netanyahu's extreme right-wing education minister, praised Trump's shift from the two-state solution. "A new era. New ideas. No need for 3rd Palestinian state beyond Jordan & Gaza. Big day for Israelis & reasonable Arabs. Congrats," he said on Twitter. He added in Hebrew: "After 24 years, the Palestinian flag has come down from the mast and the Israeli flag has taken its place," referring to the 1993 Oslo accords calling for the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

Both Trump and Netanyahu issued bellicose warnings to Iran, suggesting that Washington and its main client state in the Middle East are preparing for a redoubling of the provocations and aggression that have repeatedly brought the region to the brink of a war that would have incalculable consequences.

Netanyahu made reference to "a regional approach involving our newfound Arab partners," while Trump responded by saying, "So, I didn't know you were going to be mentioning that, but that's—now that you did, I think it's a terrific thing and I think we have some pretty good cooperation from people that in the past would never, ever have even thought about doing this."

These statements follow a report from Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas over the weekend that a senior Egyptian official, apparently acting in cooperation with Israel, had put forward a proposal for a transfer of the Palestinian refugee population to the Sinai Peninsula and the annexation of the Gaza Strip, leaving Israel in control of the West Bank.

Trump's CIA Director Mike Pompeo held secret talks with Abbas on Tuesday in Ramallah. The US intelligence agency has played a major role in shaping and assisting the Palestinian Authority as an instrument for containing and repressing the resistance of the Palestinian people.

The reaction of the Palestinian Authority leadership was to plead with Washington to continue the two-state charade on the grounds that abandoning it would undermine "American interests." The renunciation of the two-state solution would strip the last shred of legitimacy from the PA leaders, who have become millionaires off of CIA payments and foreign aid grants.

More broadly, the emerging US-Israeli strategy appears to be aimed at securing the support of reactionary Sunni Arab regimes for a military buildup against Iran, with the Palestinians to be used as a bargaining chip in a new and bloody imperialist carve-up of the Middle East.

While calling on two obscure right-wing US news outlets—Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network and the Townhall website—to avoid any hostile questions, Trump was asked by an Israeli reporter to respond to a sharp rise in anti-Semitic incidents in the US since his election, and the perception that behind it, "your administration is playing with xenophobia and maybe racist tones."

Trump made a rambling reply referring to the number of electoral votes he won in the 2016 election and adding that "there's tremendous enthusiasm out there." He made no mention, much less any condemnation, of anti-Semitic attacks; instead he merely stated, "As far as people, Jewish people, so many friends; a daughter who happens to be here right now; a son-in-law, and three beautiful grandchildren," referring to his daughter Ivanka and her husband Jared Kushner.

Netanyahu jumped in, declaring: "There is no greater supporter of the Jewish people and the Jewish state than President Donald Trump. I think we should put that to rest."

That the Trump White House has as its "chief strategist" Stephen Bannon, until recently the head of Breitbart News, which serves as a platform for white nationalists and anti-Semites, is not an issue for the Israeli leader. His only concern is that Washington provide unconditional support for the predatory interests of the Israeli state and capitalist ruling elite.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site