

# In visit to Israel, Trump escalates attacks on Iran

Bill Van Auken  
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Donald Trump made clear from the moment of his arrival in Israel Monday that the purpose of his trip, promoted by the White House and the media as part of a quest for “Middle East peace,” is the consolidation of reactionary regional alliance in support of a US military buildup against Iran.

The US president flew to Tel Aviv directly from Saudi Arabia, where he delivered an inflammatory speech designed to consolidate a military alliance of Sunni oil monarchies and dictatorships against Iran. Portraying the struggle as one of “good against evil” and invoking “god” nine times, Trump made a clear appeal to sectarian divisions to promote what amounts to a holy war by the Sunni regimes against the predominantly Shia Iran.

While there was reportedly some disquiet in Israel over the US administration’s signing of arms deals with the Saudi monarchy that could total some \$350 billion over the next decade, the speech and the turn by the Trump administration to an aggressively anti-Iranian policy went down well with the Zionist state, which, like Washington, sees Iran as the principal rival for regional hegemony.

Trump kept up his anti-Iranian rhetoric in statements made during meetings with Israeli President Reuven Rivlin and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Speaking alongside Rivlin, Trump said, “There is growing realization among your Arab neighbors that they have common cause with you in the threat posted by Iran.

“Most importantly,” he added, “the United States and Israel can declare with one voice that Iran must never be allowed to possess a nuclear weapon—never, ever—and must cease its deadly funding, training and equipping of terrorists and militias, and it must cease immediately.”

Appearing with Netanyahu, the American president denounced the nuclear agreement signed by his predecessor Barack Obama and the leaders of five other major powers with Iran in 2015 as a “terrible thing.”

“We not only gave them a lifeline,” he said. “we gave them wealth and prosperity, and we also gave them the ability to continue with terror.”

While Trump has yet to follow through on his vow to rip up the accord and has kept in place waivers on sanctions imposed in relation to Tehran’s nuclear program, the speech delivered in Riyadh and his remarks in Israel spell out a US policy of regime change in Iran that threatens to unleash an even more devastating war in the Middle East.

Trump’s statements have provoked expressions of unease, particularly in Europe, which has viewed the nuclear deal with Iran as an opening to new markets and sources of profit. The *Financial Times* of London published an editorial Monday titled “Trump of Arabia takes sides in sectarian conflict,” warning that “backing Sunni Arab autocrats against Shia Iran will not help the Middle East.”

The French daily *Le Monde* editorialized that Washington was pursuing a “Cold War”-style policy in the Middle East, dividing it between “two camps: Sunni Arabs, Israelis and Americans on one side; Iranians, their Syrian protege and Russia on the other,” warning that it would pave the way to the “continuation of the endless wars ravaging the region.”

The arrogance of Trump’s denunciations of Iran, which last week held a hotly contested presidential election, while praising Saudi Arabia, one of the world’s last absolute monarchies and the source of both the religious ideology and financial resources underpinning Al Qaeda, ISIS and similar Islamist groups, was denounced by the government in Tehran.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi Monday called upon Washington to abandon its “policy of warmongering, meddling, Iranophobia and sales of dangerous and useless weapons to the main sponsors of terrorism.”

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, who was reelected with a wide margin of victory Friday after running on a program promoting rapprochement with the West, made an indirect reference to the Saudi connections to the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York City and Washington “You can’t resolve the issue of terrorism by giving money to super powers,” he said. “I don’t think people of America would trade the blood they gave on 9/11 in exchange for money

raised in arms sales.”

Rouhani also pointed to the hypocrisy of Trump’s speech in Riyadh, coming in the wake of the Iranian election: “Mr. Trump visited the region at the time millions of our people went to the polls. He went to a country whose people haven’t even seen ballot boxes and elections don’t have any meaning for them. I hope one day Saudi Arabia also derives its national strength through elections. Power should not pass on through inheritance, but through elections.”

In what amounted to a pair of religiously themed photo ops, Trump, his wife Melania, daughter Ivanka and son-in-law Jared Kushner went to both the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Western Wall Monday. The visit was the first by any US president to the Old City of Jerusalem, which is regarded internationally as illegally occupied territory, seized by Israel 50 years ago.

Trump’s promotion of the charade of a US-brokered Israeli-Palestinian “peace” was a decidedly secondary element of his trip. He presented it almost entirely from the standpoint of a gesture needed to give cover to the reactionary Sunni Arab oil sheikdoms so that they can openly align themselves with Israel. “King Salman feels very strongly and, I can tell you, would love to see peace with Israel and the Palestinians,” he said after meeting with President Rivlin.

The Arab monarchies have dropped even their earlier demands for a “two-state solution” that would leave Palestinians trapped in a fragmented, Israeli-dominated mini-state, calling merely for minor concessions.

A discussion paper circulated among these regimes that was obtained by the *Wall Street Journal* indicated that, in the interests of forging an alliance against Iran, they are prepared to normalize relations with Israel in return for minimal concessions, such as the freezing of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and the easing of trade restrictions on the Gaza Strip.

On the eve of Trump’s arrival, the Israeli cabinet approved a limited increase in the number of building permits issued to Palestinians living in “Area C” of the West Bank, which Israel controls directly and aims to eventually annex. It also extended the opening of the Allenby Bridge border crossing between the West Bank and Jordan to 24 hours a day and allowed for the development of some industrial zones in the occupied territory.

“This is a gesture for President Trump’s visit, which does not harm Israel’s interests,” an Israeli government official told the Israeli media.

To say that Trump is going through the motions in terms of seeking a resumption of peace talks would be an exaggeration. He is to meet Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas during a trip Tuesday to the Occupied

West Bank city of Bethlehem that is scheduled to last for all of one hour. While initially the US president was to squeeze in more religious tourism with a visit to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem’s Manger Square, this plan was scrapped when it emerged that he would have to pass a protest tent erected in support of the Palestinian political prisoners on hunger strike.

Schools, public transit, banks and stores were shut down by a general strike in the occupied West Bank Monday in support of more than 1,300 Palestinian political prisoners who have been on hunger strike since April 17. In several demonstrations held in conjunction with the strike, Trump was burned in effigy.

More than 1,000 Palestinian demonstrators converged on the Qalandiya checkpoint between Jerusalem and Ramallah carrying placards bearing Trump’s image defaced with a red shoe print declaring, “American policies are a foot print of shame on humanity’s forehead.” Israeli troops attacked the demonstrators with tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition.

A 16-year-old Palestinian was shot to death by border police at a checkpoint northeast of Bethlehem on Monday. An Israeli police spokesman claimed the youth had tried to stab Israeli border police, none of whom were injured in the alleged assault. Just two days earlier, 23-year-old Mutaz Hussien Hilal Bani Shamsa was shot dead by a Zionist settler who got out of his car and opened fire on a demonstration in support of the hunger strikers.

In contrast to the growing militancy of the Palestinian population, the corrupt Palestinian Authority led by Abbas, which is heavily dependent upon funding from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf oil sheikdoms, is moving to accommodate itself to Trump’s Mideast policy. Abbas was among those attending the US president’s anti-Iranian diatribe in Riyadh, and he is reportedly prepared to present a new proposal for “peace” negotiations that drops all references to Jerusalem and cedes to Israel three times as much land as the PA previously offered.



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