

EU rejects Trump's call to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital

Alex Lantier**12 December 2017**

At a meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the foreign ministers of the European Union (EU) member states in Brussels yesterday, the EU rejected the demand spearheaded by US President Donald Trump to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. This call openly tramples international law, which has long maintained that the status of Jerusalem can be settled only in peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians.

The Brussels meeting, coming after Netanyahu met French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris for tense talks over the weekend, pointed to explosive divisions between Washington and its European allies over the growing conflicts in the Middle East. At the same time, European officials issued reactionary denunciations of protests that are spreading internationally against Trump's demand.

Though EU officials repeatedly opposed Trump's proposal on Jerusalem before the summit—after meeting Netanyahu on Sunday, Macron called it "contrary to international law and dangerous for world peace"—Netanyahu said he expected European opposition would ultimately be overcome.

"I believe that all, or most, of the European countries will move their embassies to Jerusalem, recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and engage robustly with us for security, prosperity and peace," he said. He also claimed that Israel helps Europe fight terrorism and shields Europe from refugee flows out of the war-torn Middle East.

Netanyahu aggressively promoted Trump's provocative proposal, which has exposed the fraud of the so-called "peace process" in Palestine, triggered mass protests and raised the specter of a new escalation of war in the Middle East. Demonstrations have erupted from Indonesia in Southeast Asia, across the Middle

East including in Lebanon yesterday, to Tunisia and Europe. While Netanyahu was in Paris this weekend, Palestinian groups held a protest on Republic Square.

Netanyahu claimed, however, that in demanding Jerusalem be made Israel's capital, "what President Trump has done is put facts squarely on the table. Peace is based on reality. ... Jerusalem is Israel's capital, no one can deny it. It doesn't obviate peace, it makes peace possible."

After Netanyahu's summit meeting with EU foreign ministers, however, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini said the EU would not support the proposal or move its embassies from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. "The prime minister mentioned a few times he expected other countries to follow president Trump's decision... He can keep his expectations for others, but from the European Union member states' side, this move will not come," Mogherini said.

Mogherini reiterated the EU's support for the common existence of Israeli and Palestinian national states, based on the borders prior to the 1967 war. She called this the "international consensus" and added that the EU would continue to support it until the status of Jerusalem was resolved by international negotiations.

Mogherini said the EU was acting in an attempt to prevent Trump's actions from triggering more opposition to US policy in the region. "We do not wish to see a discredited US administration when it comes to the negotiations in the Middle East," she said.

Two governments with far-right ties, the Czech Republic and Hungary, had signaled support last week for Netanyahu's positions. Hungary vetoed a draft EU statement condemning the call to move the Israeli capital to Jerusalem, while the Czech government had issued a statement declaring that it "recognises

Jerusalem to be in practice the capital of Israel.” Subsequently, it issued a statement declaring that this previous statement had applied only to Israeli-held West Jerusalem. Yesterday, however, neither government publicly supported Netanyahu’s positions.

The EU’s refusal to back Trump’s demand for what is effectively an Israeli annexation of Jerusalem comes amid a downward spiral of war and bloodshed across the region. The United States and its European allies have suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Russia and Iran in the proxy war for regime change in Syria launched by NATO in 2011. Over six years of war that left hundreds of thousands dead in Syria and Iraq and forced tens of millions to flee, it became clear that the NATO powers’ Islamist proxies in the region had no real popular support whatsoever.

This defeat has not lessened, but rather increased, the danger that the ongoing wars created by decades of imperialist intervention in the Middle East could coalesce into an all-out regional war, or even a US-European-Russian conflict. The imperialist powers have no intention of ceding ground to Russia, Iran, or other powers such as China that are rapidly developing their influence in the Middle East. However, Washington and the main European powers are increasingly at odds over how to pursue this escalation and divide the spoils.

While the EU sought to bolster its regional military deployments by deepening its commercial influence in Iran after the adoption of the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal, Washington is pushing for all-out military escalation. These divisions have widened since Trump’s election and his trip to the Middle East in May, in which he handed a blank check to Saudi Arabia for action against Iran. The EU opposed Trump’s threat to de-certify the Iranian nuclear treaty, and France sought to defuse the situation last month when Saudi Arabia detained Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri.

Trump’s call to make Jerusalem Israel’s capital comes after repeated Israeli air strikes, launched with tacit US backing, against government forces inside Syria aligned with Russia and Iran. The Israeli daily *Ha’aretz* wrote that this signified that Israel is “willing to risk a new front with Iran,” and advocated “eyeing the US to form a decided strategy.” Last week, Israeli officials denounced Iran after the leader of an Iranian-backed Iraqi militia, Qais al-Khazali, visited and

delivered speeches near the Lebanese-Israeli border.

Increasingly, the regional powers are preparing for a new, even bloodier war. A major target of the US-Israeli escalation, as of Saudi Arabia’s detention of Hariri, is the Iranian-aligned Hezbollah militia in Lebanon. In 2006, Hezbollah fought an Israeli invasion force attacking Lebanon to a draw, and concerns are growing in Israeli media that Hezbollah has been strengthened militarily by its participation in the war against the US-backed intervention in Syria.

In this explosive crisis, the EU powers play a reactionary role. They are trying firstly to dissociate themselves from Washington and Tel Aviv in order to pursue their own imperialist interests, but above all to suppress anti-war protests against the reactionary policies of Trump and Netanyahu.

In a France Inter radio interview, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian warned of the danger of mass protests against Israel in the Palestinian territory: “It is a risk, I do not wish it, I think everyone has to calm down now.” He added, “In fact, the United States are isolated on this matter.”

Social-democratic Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo also issued a reactionary attack on the protests against Israel’s threat to annex Jerusalem in her city. Even as Netanyahu orients to far-right forces in Eastern Europe closely tied to anti-Semitic movements, Hidalgo branded opponents of Netanyahu’s policy as anti-Semites, saying: “Anti-semitism, which hides behind anti-Zionism, should never be allowed to win.”



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