Trump recognizes Israeli annexation of Golan Heights: Green light for global war

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The hastily completed White House ceremony in which President Donald Trump signed a decree granting official US recognition to Israel's illegal annexation of Syria's Golan Heights is an act which, on its surface, appears to change few facts on the ground in the Middle East. No one should underestimate, however, its far-reaching global implications.

In a brief proclamation, witnessed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Trump declared that "the United States recognizes that the Golan Heights are part of the State of Israel."

He argued that Israel's illegal seizure of the Golan Heights in 1967, its unilateral annexation of the territory 14 years later and its continued assertion of control along with the aggressive buildup of Jewish settlements and Israeli capitalist exploitation in the territory were all justified by "Israel's need to protect itself from Syria and other regional threats," including Iran.

What nonsense. Trump turns reality on its head. Israel has used the Golan Heights as a launching pad for its own relentless attacks on Syria, which have included the Israeli arming and support for Islamist militias, including ISIS, in the war for regime change against the government of Bashar al-Assad, as well as the thousands of air strikes which Israel's own military chief of staff acknowledged earlier this year.

Washington's recognition of "Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights" comes amid reports that the US military is consolidating its permanent occupation of eastern Syria, including the country's main oil and gas-producing areas, even after Trump's abortive announcement at the end of last year that he was going to "bring the troops home" from Syria. In recent weeks, there have been reports that some 1,000 troops—backed by larger numbers across the border in Iraq—will remain on Syrian soil, while the US military has been spotted trucking large quantities of arms and materiel into the US-occupied zone.

In other words, Trump is recognizing Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights, even as Washington is occupying and effectively annexing Syrian territory east of the Euphrates River.

In short-range political terms, Trump's action was unquestionably aimed at propping up his right-wing ally Netanyahu, who faces a raft of corruption charges and potential defeat at the polls on April 9 at the hands of a slate of generals assembled by the so-called Blue and White coalition headed by former chief of staff Benny Gantz.

Netanyahu, who is both Israel's prime minister and defense minister, cut short his visit to Washington to return to Israel in order to be seen leading the vengeful onslaught against Gaza for the firing of a single missile that killed no one and for which both Hamas, which administers the occupied territory, and Islamic Jihad, its other major armed faction, have denied responsibility.

Israeli warplanes carried out bombing raids across the Gaza Strip, including in the densely populated Gaza City. In other acts of collective punishment, the Israeli occupation forces blocked the sole two existing crossing points into the impoverished territory, an effective open-air prison for 2 million Palestinians, and forcibly turned back Palestinian fishermen attempting to fish off the territory's coast.

Hamas officials announced Monday night that they had reached a cease-fire agreement brokered by Egypt, but Tel Aviv remained silent on the matter. Netanyahu's electoral opponents are all attacking him from the right, accusing him of failing to take sufficiently bloody measures to quell resistance in Gaza. The leader of the Labor Party, what passes for Israel's bourgeois "left," denounced Netanyahu as a man "of talk and not actions." The Israel Defense Forces, meanwhile, have beefed up their Gaza division with another 1,000 troops, an additional infantry and armored brigade, as top officials warn that "all options are on the table."

Trump's recognition of Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights will serve in the first instance to fuel Israeli military aggression in the occupied territories and throughout the region. It will also push the already rightward lurching trajectory of Israel's capitalist political setup ever further

toward outright fascism.

The present election cycle has seen Netanyahu ally himself with the fascist Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power) party, which is an offshoot of the Kach Party of Meir Kahane, which was defined by the US State Department as a terrorist organization. Together with the religious Zionists of the Jewish Home party, Netanyahu's coalition stands for the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian population from Israel and the occupied territories in pursuit of the goal of a "Greater Israel," an imperialist and colonialist project that is bound up with the subjugation of the Middle East to US imperialist interests and the preparation for war with Iran.

The turn toward openly fascistic politics, bound up with the growth of militarism in Israel as it is internationally, is unmistakable in the current Israeli elections. Campaign propaganda has included one television ad featuring the country's extreme right-wing Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked spraying herself with a bottle of perfume labeled "Fascism" and turning to the camera to declare, "To me, it smells like democracy." Another has the right-wing Knesset member, Oren Hazan, in a parody of a Clint Eastwood movie, shooting to death Jamal Zahalka, a Palestinian citizen of Israel and leading member of the Balad party in the Knesset.

For the Golan Heights, Trump's edict will doubtless spur on Israel's drive to eradicate what remains of the territory's original population. Some 130,000 Syrians fled for their lives when the Israeli military invaded the Golan in 1967. The remaining 25,000 Druze Arabs in their overwhelming majority have rejected Tel Aviv's attempts to force them to accept Israeli citizenship and insist that they are Syrians.

On Saturday, hundreds marched in the Golan Heights town of Majdal Shams in protest over Trump's impending decree. One told the media, "From here we say that the Golan [Heights] is Arab and Syrian and neither Trump nor any other person can decide its fate." Another said, "He wants to give Israel land, he can give them one or two of his states in America."

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, during a tour of the Middle East that brought him to both Israel and Lebanon last week, was asked by a reporter if the US was pursuing a "double-standard policy" in recognizing Israeli sovereignty over territories seized from Syria, while indicting Russia for annexing Crimea, the pretext for the imposition of sanctions and an aggressive escalation of military threats from NATO. Never mind that the population of the Golan Heights has rejected Israeli occupation for over 50 years, while that of the Crimea overwhelmingly welcomed Russian citizenship.

"No, not at all," Pompeo responded idiotically. "What the president did with the Golan Heights is recognize the reality on the ground and the security situation necessary for the protection of the Israeli state. It's that—it's that simple."

Recognizing the "reality on the ground" and what was necessary for the "security situation" of states was precisely the rationale given for the annexations that led to the deaths of hundreds of millions in the course of the first half of the 20th century.

The Austro-Hungarian empire's annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1909 is viewed by historians as the prelude to the First World War, while the series of annexations carried out by the Nazi regime in Germany set the stage for the Second World War.

It was in recognition of these historical "realities" that, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the major powers amended the Geneva Conventions and adopted a founding charter of the United Nations with the aim of outlawing such annexations and rejecting threats to the territorial integrity of existing states.

In the preparation for a third world war, these principles formally accepted in the aftermath of the second have been thrown onto the scrap heap. The Trump administration's sanctification of Israel's land grab in the Golan sets the stage for new and far bloodier invasions, annexations and the revival of outright 21st century colonialism.

US imperialism is attempting to legitimize this half-century-old crime in order to pave the way for far larger wars in the Middle East. Its action, however, takes place amid a steady escalation of the class struggle throughout the region, from the mass protests and strikes that have shaken Algeria, to the struggle of teachers and other workers challenging the monarchical regime in Morocco, to workers struggles in Iran, protests against the abysmal social conditions in Gaza and strikes by rail workers in Israel itself in defiance of deals worked out between the state and the official union, Histadrut.

The only answer to the threat of war and fascism lies in the independent political mobilization of the working class. In response to the right-wing turn of Washington and Tel Aviv, this poses the urgent necessity of uniting Jewish and Arab workers in the struggle for a Socialist Federation of the Middle East as part of the struggle to put an end to capitalism across the planet.

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