

Netanyahu pledges to annex West Bank if re-elected

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Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has declared his intention of extending Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank, captured in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, if he is re-elected prime minister in Tuesday's general election.

In so doing, he has effectively repudiated the entire post-World War II international order and signalled that wars of conquest and territorial aggrandisement are the order of the day. Such annexations were declared illegal under the Geneva Conventions, enacted in the wake of the Second World War to prevent the repetition of similar actions carried out by Germany's Nazi regime, which set the stage for the outbreak of war in 1939.

Netanyahu's announcement will give succour to his support base among fascistic layers of the settlers and religious nationalists, driving Israel's capitalist political setup ever further toward outright apartheid, fascism and military dictatorship. It is a prelude to intensified Israeli military aggression in the occupied West Bank, Gaza and the broader Middle East.

Netanyahu told a television Channel 12 interviewer on Saturday that he would not "evacuate any community." Nor would he divide Jerusalem, a reference to Palestinian demands for East Jerusalem to serve as the capital of a future Palestinian state. He said, "I will not divide Jerusalem, I will not evacuate any community and I will make sure we control the territory west of Jordan."

He added, "A Palestinian state will endanger our existence and I withstood huge pressure over the past eight years. No prime minister has withstood such pressure. We must control our destiny."

Netanyahu made it clear that he viewed President Donald Trump's recognition of Israel's illegal annexation of Syria's Golan Heights, captured in 1967, as a green light to press on with Likud's long-held expansionist policy of a Greater Israel. He said, "Will we move ahead to the next stage? Yes. I will extend sovereignty, but I don't distinguish between the settlement blocs and the isolated ones, because each settlement is Israeli, and I will not hand it over to Palestinian sovereignty."

Speaking about the Bedouin community of Khan al-Ahmar, which he has pledged to evacuate despite international outrage, Netanyahu promised that "it will happen." He added, "I promised, and it will happen at the soonest opportunity."

Netanyahu's announcement was aimed at bolstering his position in the election, which he had called ahead of schedule in order to win political backing to ensure his immunity from prosecution on a raft of corruption charges. Facing unexpectedly strong opposition from a slate of generals assembled by the so-called Blue and White coalition, headed by former chief of staff Benny Gantz, he has leveraged Trump's support to appeal to his right-wing support base.

He has brought into his electoral coalition, and a possible share of government power should he win, outright fascist elements linked to the banned Kach Party of the late Meir Kahane, a party that was designated a terrorist organization by the US, Canada, the European Union, Japan and Israel itself.

Trump's naked interference in the Israeli elections is bound up with US imperialism's broader aim of escalating its military intervention in the Middle East to roll back the growth of Iranian influence in the wake of the successive debacles suffered by Washington in Iraq, Libya and Syria.

Netanyahu's growing alliance with the House of Saud and the petro-monarchs of the Gulf has served to ensure their acquiescence—with pro forma denunciations—to this latest assault on the Palestinians.

But apart from Netanyahu's short-term political calculations, his announcement derives from Zionism's foundation upon exclusivist conceptions of racial, religious and linguistic hegemony to justify the establishment of a Jewish state through the violent dispossession of the indigenous Arab population, who formed the overwhelming majority of the population, making use of the horrors of the Holocaust as a rationale for the oppression of another people.

The political antecedents of Netanyahu's Likud Party,

Vladimir Jabotinsky's Revisionists, who were to remain a minority tendency until the 1970s, articulated this position most clearly. Their aim was the establishment of a Jewish state on the entire land of Biblical Palestine, including Transjordan. With the Jews a minority in Palestine, such a state would necessarily mean expelling the Arab population to ensure its Jewish character.

In 1923, Jabotinsky explained, in an article titled "The Iron Wall," that the Zionist project could be achieved only against the wishes of the native population. He envisaged the need for an iron wall to protect the Jews from the native population. He said, "A voluntary reconciliation with the Arabs is out of the question either now or in the near future." Without a garrison, Zionist colonization of Palestine would be impossible, and "therefore it stands or falls by the question of armed force."

The establishment of a Jewish state was viewed with sympathy by millions of people around the world, who were appalled at the catastrophe that had befallen the Jews. But the major powers excluding Britain, but including the Soviet Union, supported the establishment of a Jewish state as a means of blocking Britain's position in the Middle East. As a result, the UN voted in 1947 for the partition of Palestine, hailing the new state as a progressive entity dedicated to building a democratic and egalitarian society for the most cruelly oppressed people of Europe.

As soon as the State of Israel was declared in 1948, war broke out between the Arabs and the Jews, who were able to seize more land than was included in the 1947 partition plan, driving out some 750,000 Palestinians from their homes. Not wanting to pay the price of the concessions demanded by the superpowers, in terms of borders and refugees, Israel's Labour government did not try to make peace after the war, instead instituting a policy of "striving for peace"—but not too fast—which became the template for future governments. The more Israel got used to the situation of neither peace nor war, the louder grew the voices calling for the maintenance of the status quo.

After the 1967 war, when Israel captured East Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan, Gaza and the Sinai peninsula from Egypt and the Golan Heights from Syria, the Labour government moved rapidly to annex East Jerusalem and build settlements in the occupied territories that are now home to some 700,000 Israeli Jews, many of them extreme nationalists and religious zealots who are heavily armed. Labour had, in effect, adopted the Revisionists' policy.

The war and the settlement movement spawned the growth of immensely reactionary political and social forces within Israel itself, with Menachem Begin's Likud party demanding the territories be brought under Israeli sovereignty on the grounds that they were the Biblical lands

of Samaria and Judea, promised by God to the Jewish people.

In 1993, a Labour government signed an illusory peace deal, the Oslo Accords, brokered by the US, with the Palestine Liberation Organization. Ostensibly, the agreement was to usher in a Palestinian statelet. But its real purpose was to prevent the *intifada* that broke out in 1987 from developing into a revolutionary uprising by the Palestinian masses in the occupied territories, and to subcontract the task of suppressing the masses to the Palestinian bourgeoisie.

Instead of peace and a Palestinian state, the Oslo Accords set the stage for an expansion of the settlements and land seizures to control the access roads to these enclaves and strengthen their connection to Israel itself, with the Palestinian Authority left to police small patches of land, mostly impoverished cities, surrounded and cut off by Israeli troops.

In line with its long-held policy, the Likud Party vehemently opposed any territorial concessions to the Palestinians embodied in the Accords. Its leaders stood by as its angry supporters called Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin a traitor, paving the way for his murder in 1995 by a right-wing fanatic. With none of the mainstream political parties prepared to make any fundamental changes, the fraudulent peace process was all but dead.

Netanyahu has now made explicit what has long been implicit: the incorporation of the West Bank into a Greater Israel. It can be achieved and sustained only through the imposition of military rule. To this end, his government has passed a series of measures, including the openly racist "Nation-State Law" enshrining Jewish supremacy as the legal foundation of the state, bringing the political and legal system into alignment with the reality of Jabotinsky's garrison state, based on the brutal oppression of an entire people, the Palestinians.

The so-called "centre-left" opposition in the elections, led by Gantz, has not challenged Netanyahu's annexation pledge, resorting to verbal obfuscations and calls for a "regional conference" or "secure separation," thereby signifying consent.

This marks the historic bankruptcy and culmination of the entire reactionary Zionist project and all such nationalist programs.



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