

Pence, Netanyahu use Holocaust event in Israel to rail against Iran

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US Vice President Mike Pence and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu joined Thursday in turning a gathering in Jerusalem, ostensibly convened to mark the 75th anniversary of the Red Army's liberation of Auschwitz, the Nazi death camp in Poland, into a platform for escalating imperialist aggression against Iran.

In his remarks at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Remembrance Center, Pence compared US aggression against Iran, a historically oppressed and former semi-colonial country, to World War II and the fight against Germany's Nazi Third Reich.

Pence declared: "We must be prepared to stand as they did against the wave of their times ... In that same spirit, we must also stand strong against the leading state purveyor of anti-Semitism, against the one government in the world that denies the Holocaust as a matter of state policy and threatens to wipe Israel off the map. The world must stand strong against the Islamic Republic of Iran."

Pence's anti-Iranian tirade echoed that of Netanyahu, who spoke shortly before him. The Israeli prime minister denounced "the tyrants of Tehran," while praising the Trump administration for "confronting Iran." He added, in a remark evidently aimed at the Western European powers, which recently threatened to re-invoke sanctions against Iran, "We have yet to see a unified and resolute stance against the most anti-Semitic regime on the planet, a regime that openly seeks to develop nuclear weapons and annihilate the one and only Jewish state."

These speeches were given to an audience of heads and representatives of governments from countries where real anti-Semitic violence is on the rise—including notably the US, where President Donald Trump has openly encouraged and curried favor with

neo-fascist and white supremacist elements who have carried out synagogue massacres. Neither Pence nor Netanyahu can point to a single such attack in Iran, which has the largest Jewish population of any predominantly Muslim country.

The slander of "anti-Semitism" and unfounded claims that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons—weapons that Israel has already obtained—are propaganda to justify a steady buildup toward war against Iran. Tensions between Washington and Tehran were brought to the brink of full-scale conflict on January 3 with the criminal US drone missile assassination of Iran's General Qassem Suleimani at Baghdad's international airport, along with that of nine other Iranians and Iraqis.

While Iran's clerical-led bourgeois nationalist government limited itself to a largely symbolic missile strike on two US-occupied bases in Iraq that inflicted no deaths or serious injuries on any US personnel, Washington has continued its provocations while steadily building up its forces in the Persian Gulf for war.

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland on Thursday, US Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook threatened that Suleimani's successor, General Esmail Qaani, "will meet the same fate" as Suleimani if there are "any attacks against American personnel or interests in the region."

Also on Thursday, the chief of the US Central Command, Marine General Kenneth McKenzie, spoke to some 2,000 US Marines aboard the amphibious assault ship USS Bataan, now in the northern Red Sea heading toward Iran, telling them that they could be there for "quite a while." Since last May, when the Trump administration began its military escalation against Iran, the number of US troops deployed to the

region has swelled from roughly 60,000 to more than 80,000.

Meanwhile, a bomber strike force consisting of six B-52 Stratofortress long-range bombers ordered deployed against Iran in the immediate aftermath of the Suleimani assassination has begun to arrive on the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, a British colonial possession that is within striking distance of Iran but beyond the range of Iran's longest-range missiles. These heavy bombers are capable of carrying up to 70,000 pounds of munitions, including long-range nuclear-tipped cruise missiles.

Thursday's event in Jerusalem, held under the banner of "Remembering the Holocaust, Fighting Antisemitism," was billed as the largest assemblage of foreign heads of state in the country's history. Israeli President Reuven Rivlin delivered an obsequious opening welcome to the assembled international audience, addressing himself to "your royal highnesses, kings and queens, presidents and prime ministers."

Significantly, not a single representative attended from the rest of the Middle East, Asia or Africa, and just one from Latin America, Argentina's President Alberto Fernandez.

Many of those who spoke uttered empty platitudes about "never forgetting" the Holocaust. Typical was Prince Charles, who represented Britain, telling the gathering that "hatred and intolerance still lurk in the human heart."

The thrust of the event, however, was to equate opposition to Zionism and the state of Israel to anti-Semitism, while downplaying the very real and escalating threats posed to Jews and others by the promotion of fascist movements and ideologies on the part of capitalist governments across the globe.

The glitzy ceremony and gathering of international dignitaries was met with protests outside the Yad Vashem Holocaust Remembrance Center, denouncing the turning of a supposed remembrance of the mass murder of Europe's Jews into a "celebration." The gathering provoked anger as it emerged that only a handful of Israel's some 212,000 Holocaust survivors—roughly a third of whom live in poverty—were allowed to attend.

Some Israelis have described Yad Vashem as a "washing machine," where the Netanyahu government invites far-right leaders for photo-ops as a means of

cleansing themselves of the stench of anti-Semitism by supporting the right-wing government of Israel.

Even before the ceremonies in Jerusalem had drawn to a close, Trump intervened with an announcement that he had invited Netanyahu and his electoral opponent, the former chief of the Israel Defense Forces, Benny Gantz, to Washington to discuss his so-called Middle East "peace plan." Israel TV described the proposed deal as "the most generous proposal" ever presented by Washington, granting Israel unrestricted sovereignty over all of Jerusalem and the "right" to annex all of the Zionist settlements on the occupied West Bank, while denying the right of return of Palestinian refugees and excluding Palestinians from any supervision of their own borders in an envisioned Bantustan-style mini-state.

The date Trump set for discussion of this "peace plan," which can only provoke intensified Palestinian resistance as well as a deeper crisis within Israel itself, is January 28, the same day that the Israeli Knesset is scheduled to vote for a committee that will reject Netanyahu's request for immunity from multiple corruption charges that could send him to jail. In March, Israel is facing its third election in under a year, as neither of the major political factions has proven able to form a government.



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