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Hope fades for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

The election of Donald Trump may mark the end of any realistic hope of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And don't expect the Democratic Party to try to save it, it appears.

Trump has appointed two strident advocates of Israel's right-wing settler movement to the key positions of U.S. ambassador to Israel and chief negotiator. Ambassador-designate David Friedman insists the United States should end the "two-state narrative" and claims that moderate Zionist groups like J Street who support it are "far worse than kapos — Jews who turned in their fellow Jews in the Nazi death camps."

With the incoming administration's rejection of the long-held international consensus that Israeli colonization of the Palestinian West Bank is both illegal and an obstacle to peace, and with his pledge to block any international action to prevent it, there will be nothing to stop Israel's right-wing government from consolidating its control over the occupied territory.

With Palestine's remaining population centers in the West Bank increasingly surrounded by large Israeli settlement blocs, a viable contiguous Palestinian state alongside Israel would become physically impossible. Palestinians would then have no choice but to demand equal rights within a greater Israel, forcing Israelis to choose between being a Jewish state or a democratic state. They could no longer be both. This was the message on Dec. 28 in Secretary of State John Kerry's address, strongly denounced by the Israeli government, the Republicans, and a surprisingly large number of congressional Democrats.

On Jan. 5, in one of the first acts of the new Congress, the majority of House Democrats joined virtually all the Republicans in siding with Trump against President Barack Obama in a resolution condemning the United Nations for opposing illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, claiming it was "anti-Israel" to object to the Israeli colonization of the West Bank.

Meanwhile, Trump and his appointees have reiterated plans to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, a provocative move certain to inflame regional tensions, given the ancient city's importance not just to Jews, but to Muslims and Christians as well. All foreign embassies are currently in Tel Aviv in recognition of Jerusalem's special international status as determined by the United Nations and the fact that the eastern half of the city is formally recognized as being under foreign belligerent occupation.

The formal congressional authorization to move the embassy to Jerusalem, which passed in 1995 and would serve as the legal basis for Trump's forthcoming order, was supported by 80 percent of House Democrats and 95 percent of Senate Democrats.

In late November, Rep. Eliot Engel, ranking Democrat on the Foreign Affairs Committee and the party's leading foreign policy spokesman in the House of Representatives, successfully pushed through a resolution by voice vote opposing Palestinian statehood outside of what Israel's right-wing government would agree to, calling on the U.S. government to oppose any United Nations involvement in the peace process, and calling for the U.S. to veto any U.N. resolutions critical of Israel. The broadly bipartisan effort not only called for the United States to block U.N. recognition of a Palestinian state, but threatened to cut all assistance to any international body, such as the World Health Organization, that did.

On Dec. 29, the White House made clear that not only would it refuse to join the overwhelming majority of the world's nations in recognizing Palestine, it would veto any U.N. Security Council resolution allowing Palestine to join the United Nations.

These hardline anti-Palestinian positions taken by the Democrats have nothing to do with constituent pressure. For example, a recent poll shows only 16 percent of Democrats and only 31 percent of Americans overall support the United States' blocking international recognition of Palestinian statehood.

Despite this, both parties appear determined to recognize Israeli expansionism and its annexation of lands seized by military force. This past year has seen the passage of a series of bills and resolutions by bipartisan majorities in Congress that explicitly define "Israel" as including "territories controlled by Israel." Such a legal redefinition of what constitutes "Israel" has in large part been designed to make it more difficult to oppose the Israeli occupation or colonization of the West Bank, such as through boycotting or even simply labeling products produced in illegal settlements.

The 2016 Republican platform not only fails to support the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel, as it had in previous years, it puts the party in opposition to virtually the entire international community by proclaiming Republicans "reject the false notion that Israel is an occupier." It also insists that Israel "stands out among the nations as a beacon of democracy and humanity," that "support for Israel is an expression of Americanism," and that there should be "no daylight between America and Israel."

The platform also declares that the United States will withhold funding from the United Nations, the World Court, or any other international authority that attempts to pressure Israel to withdraw or attempts to impose any kind of peace settlement.

The only mention of Palestine or Palestinians in the platform is in the environmental section, where the GOP demands an immediate halt to U.S. funding for the 2014 Framework Convention on Climate Change signed in Paris because it "grants Palestinians membership as a state."

Meanwhile, the Democratic Party platform — while supporting the concept of a two-state solution in theory — insists such a solution could only come on Israeli terms through direct negotiations. Not only did the Democrats refuse to oppose or even acknowledge the occupation and settlements, it criticized the U.N. and civil society movements for their opposition and praised Israel's commitment to "equality, tolerance, and pluralism."

Both Republican and Democratic supporters of an Israeli takeover of much or all of the occupied Palestinian territories assume it would somehow be good for Israel. In reality, not only will Jewish Israelis be faced with ongoing Palestinian resistance and international isolation, the demographic realities would eventually lead them to become a minority within their own country and therefore they would have to either accept Palestinian leadership or impose what would essentially be apartheid.

In other words, the very politicians who consider themselves "pro-Israel" may actually be sowing the seeds of the end of Israel as a Jewish state.

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