

Kerry argues against ditching the “two-state solution” in the Middle East

By Patrick Martin
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In a lengthy speech delivered at the State Department headquarters in Washington, Secretary of State John Kerry defended the longstanding US policy of supporting a “two-state solution” of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The speech was something of a eulogy for a policy being consigned to the rubbish heap by the incoming Trump administration and the government of Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel, both of which support the ultra-right Israeli settlers on the West Bank who seek the complete dispossession of the Palestinian people.

Kerry was defending the Obama administration’s decision not to veto UN Security Resolution 2334, adopted last week by a 14-0 vote, with the United States abstaining. The resolution criticizes Israel’s policy of expanding Jewish settlements on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem, but includes no enforcement mechanism and remains a token and toothless gesture.

The vitriolic response of the Israeli government, including denunciations of the Obama administration for supposedly siding with Palestinian “terrorists” against Israeli Jews, indicates that Netanyahu has been given a green light by the incoming Trump administration to end the pretense of supporting the creation of even a puppet Palestinian state and seeking to resume peace negotiations.

Kerry’s speech was a cynical defense of the Obama administration’s record and the long-standing US policy of advocating the creation of a Palestinian state carved out of the territories seized by Israel in the 1967 Six Day War. He outlined Washington’s military, diplomatic and economic support for the Israeli state as it carried out brutal and illegal attacks on the Palestinians and Israel’s Arab neighbor states, while at the same time seeking to portray the US as a friend of

the Palestinian people and an “honest broker” in the Middle East conflict.

Kerry was remarkably defensive in the face of the enraged response from the Netanyahu government, which has the full backing not only of Trump, but also the congressional Republicans and a large section of congressional Democrats.

The secretary of state declared that no US administration had done as much for Israel as the Obama administration, citing the record \$38 billion arms deal signed this year as well as steadfast backing from Washington for Israeli war crimes in Gaza. He argued that every US president in modern history has allowed resolutions critical of Israel to pass the Security Council by abstaining rather than vetoing. George W. Bush did so six times, while for Obama, last week’s resolution was the first.

The crux of Kerry’s argument, directed largely to the US ruling elite and Congress, was that the “national interest” of American imperialism does not always and necessarily coincide with the policies of a particular Israeli government. “Regrettably,” he declared, “some seem to believe that US friendship means the US must accept any policy, regardless of our own interests.”

He explained in some detail how the growth of settlements, particularly those built deep within the West Bank on territory that would have to become part of any Palestinian mini-state, was being orchestrated to make a two-state policy impossible. He criticized the impact of the ultra-right settlers on Israeli politics.

“The Israeli prime minister publicly supports a two-state solution,” Kerry said. “But his current coalition is the most right-wing in Israeli history, with an agenda driven by the most extreme elements. The result is that policies of this government... are leading in the opposite direction. They are leading towards one

state. In fact, Israel has increasingly consolidated control over much of the West Bank for its own purposes, effectively reversing the transition to greater Palestinian civil authority that was called for by the Oslo Accords.”

Kerry reiterated the demographic argument that has long been made by the Labor wing of the Zionist ruling elite in Israel: that annexation of the West Bank would be disastrous for the state of Israel, since the rapid growth of the Palestinian population meant that Arabs would soon outnumber Jews in a combined state.

“There are a similar number of Jews and Palestinians living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea,” he said. “They have a choice. They can choose to live together in one state or they can separate into two states. But here is a fundamental reality. If the choice is one state, Israel can either be Jewish or democratic, it cannot be both. And it won’t ever really be at peace.”

US imperialism, along with its client states among the Arab monarchies and dictatorships, as well as the Labor Party wing of the Zionists, has made use of these demographic trends to argue for the establishment of a Palestinian puppet state that would police the Palestinian population while insuring a substantial Jewish majority within Israel itself.

The right wing of the Zionists, particularly the settlers, want to scrap the “two-state” policy in favor of the outright annexation of the West Bank, to be achieved by seizing more and more Palestinian land for Israeli settlement and ultimately repeating the 1947 mass expulsions of Palestinian Arabs on an even larger scale by deporting the West Bank population to Jordan.

The Obama administration and its predecessors have opposed such a policy, not because it would constitute a war crime and a humanitarian catastrophe, but because it would risk triggering upheavals throughout the Arab and Moslem world and threaten the broader interests of US imperialism.

The Trump administration appears prepared, however, to embark on such a policy, evidently calculating that it can deal with the consequences with military force. Trump has named as his ambassador to Israel his personal bankruptcy attorney, David Friedman, a longtime fundraiser for West Bank settlements who has publicly supported moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

In the run-up to the vote on the UN resolution, Trump

intervened in the diplomatic maneuvering in a way that is unprecedented for a US president-elect. Contacted by the Israelis about the Egyptian government’s role in drafting and presenting the resolution, Trump called Egyptian military dictator Abdel Fattah el-Sisi on the carpet, using the prospect of a cutoff of future US financial subsidies to induce him to drop the resolution. Four other members of the Security Council took up the resolution and forced the vote, however, foiling the Trump-Netanyahu effort and prompting Netanyahu’s explosion of rage against Kerry and Obama.

Netanyahu had a similar reaction to Kerry’s speech. He declared that the US official was “obsessed with settlements,” while ignoring what the Israeli prime minister called the “root cause” of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—the refusal of the Palestinians to accept the establishment of a Jewish state, i.e., their refusal to accept dispossession and Zionist oppression.

The immediate concern of the Netanyahu government appears to be that the US decision not to veto Resolution 2334 and Kerry’s speech are setting the stage for the adoption of a negotiating framework based on a two-state policy at the upcoming Paris conference on the Middle East, which convenes January 15. A declaration from this conference could become the basis for another UN Security Council resolution to be adopted before Trump takes office on January 20, creating diplomatic and perhaps legal obstacles to further Israeli encroachments on Palestinian territory on the West Bank.

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