

Israel-Palestine and the “two-state solution”

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The speech by US Secretary of State John Kerry on Wednesday, reaffirming US support for a “two-state solution” to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, was more than a defence of a useful political fiction. It was a warning that abandonment of the policy will have explosive consequences for the United States in the entire Middle East region and, not least, for Israel itself.

The incoming US administration of Donald Trump, together with the Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu, has denounced the Obama administration for not using its veto and instead abstaining in the vote on last week’s UN Security Council resolution criticising the expansion of Israeli settlements on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. They have been joined by a large section of Congressional Democrats.

The US decision was not made out of concern for the future of the Palestinian people. As Kerry made clear in his speech, the US has always been Israel’s chief supporter. It was motivated by the necessity to maintain the “two-state solution” as part of “advancing United States interests in the region.”

Kerry was giving voice to concerns that under conditions where the position of the US has been significantly weakened—most notably by the debacle of its attempted regime-change operation in Syria—it will suffer further major setbacks if the “two-state solution” is officially abandoned.

The concern of Kerry and the Obama administration is that the chimera of peace with the Palestinians through the establishment of their own state must be maintained because it allows the US allies in the Arab bourgeois regimes to suppress social and political opposition, thereby enabling Washington to utilise those regimes to ensure its domination over the oil-rich Middle East.

Emphasising that his task was above all to “defend the United States”, Kerry said the alternative to a “two-state solution”, that is, complete Israeli colonial

domination of the West Bank, was “fast becoming the reality on the ground”. He warned that if “we were to stand idly by knowing that in doing so we are allowing a dangerous dynamic to take hold, which promises greater conflict and instability to a region where we have vital interests, we would be derelict in our responsibilities.”

For its part, the Israeli government could have simply ignored the toothless UN resolution, which has no enforcement mechanisms and is broadly in line with similar resolutions going back decades on which the US had also abstained, as Kerry noted in his speech.

But it decided not to do so because of the shift in policy expected from the incoming Trump administration, which could abandon the two-state policy. Trump has indicated the direction of his administration with the appointment as ambassador to Israel of his personal bankruptcy lawyer, David Friedman.

Friedman is a long-time fundraiser for West Bank Jewish settlements who has supported moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem—an action that would be a de facto abandonment of the two-state policy.

Kerry warned that any such move would not only endanger the interests of the United States, but the state of Israel itself. He held out the prospect that Arab leaders were prepared to have a new relationship with Israel and that together with Tel Aviv had “common interests in countering Iran’s destabilizing activities”, but that prospects for such cooperation depended on “meaningful progress towards the two-state solution.”

However, the Israeli coalition government, Kerry said, is the “most right-wing in Israeli history with an agenda driven by the most extreme elements” and was “more committed to settlements than any in Israel’s history”, leading in the opposite direction.

The establishment of such a single state over all of “Greater Israel” would pose enormous problems for

Israel itself, Kerry warned. If occupation were officially established as permanent, then the Palestinian Authority would simply dissolve, posing the question of how Israel would respond to widespread protests and civil unrest. There would be increasing violence and growing despair among the Palestinians that “would create very fertile ground for extremists.”

The rupture between the Israeli government and the outgoing Obama administration is another expression of the breakdown of the post-war order of which the establishment of the state of Israel, backed by the United States, was an essential component.

Kerry’s speech constituted a warning that the breakdown of this order and the political relations that have been so vital to its maintenance—of which the “two-state solution” to the Israel-Palestinian conflict has been one—could have potentially catastrophic consequences.

But like every conflict and crisis, it serves a valuable educative role in burning away political fictions and laying bare the underlying and essential reality.

Two myths now stand exposed.

First, there is the claim that the establishment of the state of Israel could secure peace and security for the Jewish people after the horrors of the Holocaust. The expansionist and colonialist policy of Zionism has pitted the population of Israel against the other peoples of the region, constantly living under the danger of war, while the price of expansionism has been paid for through the creation of one of the most unequal societies in the world. The creation of the Zionist state has, as Leon Trotsky warned, proven to be a “bloody trap” for the Jewish people.

Second, the disintegration of the so-called “two-state solution” has revealed the utter bankruptcy of the claim that peace and security for the Palestinian masses and an end to their oppression by the Zionist state could be obtained through a series of deals and manoeuvres between imperialism and the bourgeois Arab regimes.

The exposure of these two fictions, however, points the way to the solution for the Jewish, Palestinian and working masses across the Middle East: the development of a unified struggle of the Arab and Jewish workers, not for the creation of unviable national bourgeois regimes, based on religious or ethnic divisions, but the establishment of a socialist federation of the Middle East as part of the fight for a

socialist world order.

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