

Canada avoids criticizing Trump over Jerusalem provocation

By Roger Jordan
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Canada's Liberal government has stood almost alone among Washington's western allies in refusing to condemn President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

While Ottawa's muted response was in part due to concerns about antagonizing the Trump administration in the midst of the NAFTA "renegotiation," it was also bound up with Canadian imperialist strategy in the oil-rich Middle East.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland said Canada would not follow Trump's lead in moving its embassy to Jerusalem. However, both refrained from criticizing Trump and were at pains to emphasize Canada's steadfast support for Israel. Asked by a journalist if he would join British Prime Minister Theresa May in passing on his concerns to Trump, Trudeau refused to answer the question, merely noting that Canada would remain engaged with international partners over the Middle East.

Trump's announcement was a deliberate provocation, effectively bringing an end to Washington's backing of the seven-decade-long fraud of a "two-state solution." It is part of Washington's comprehensive plan for an escalation of tensions throughout the Middle East in preparation for war with Iran.

Washington's move triggered sharp denunciations from the European powers. German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron and Britain's May all criticized Trump. This is not an isolated dispute, but reflects a growing rift between the former Trans-Atlantic allies that has grown rapidly in recent months on a host of issues, including Trump's plans to scuttle the Iran nuclear deal, his opposition to the Paris climate change accord, his war threats against North Korea and plans to hit German exports with trade measures.

In contrast to the European imperialist powers, Canada is firmly lining up with the Trump administration, including in its preparations for war against North Korea. The deepening global capitalist crisis and the intensifying conflicts among

the imperialist powers are undermining Canada's ability to offset the power imbalance with Washington by relying on multilateral institutions and the Trans-Atlantic alliance. Since Trump came to power, Trudeau has gone out of his way to avoid attacking his far-right program and sought to establish good working relations with the fascist-minded president, with Jerusalem merely being one example among many.

Trump's decision on Jerusalem grants the right-wing Israeli regime, Washington's closest ally in the region, a free hand to expand its illegal settlements, continue the brutal oppression of the Palestinians, and prepare for a major conflict with Hezbollah in Lebanon or in Syria.

The Trudeau government endorses this reactionary agenda because Canada's ruling elite views it as the best option for consolidating its imperialist interests in the region. Ottawa has played a key role in virtually all of the US-led wars of aggression over the past two decades in the Middle East and Central Asia, including in Afghanistan for a decade beginning in 2001, Libya in 2011 and the ongoing war in Syria and Iraq.

The latter conflict, publicly sold on the bogus pretext of combating "terrorism," grew out of the previous US wars and was from the outset part of Washington's efforts to bring about regime change in Damascus and weaken Iranian influence. This is becoming all the more clear as US troop levels are being ramped up in Syria at the very point when ISIS, the purported target of the onslaught, has been defeated in its last urban strongholds.

Canada has participated in the war in Iraq and Syria since it was launched in 2014. Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper sent six CF-18 fighter jets to carry out air strikes and a small contingent of troops to provide on-the-ground training. Trudeau, who exploited popular opposition to the war by calling for the withdrawal of the CF-18s to win election as prime minister in 2015, tripled the number of Canadian Special Forces deployed to Iraq to "advise and assist" the Kurdish Peshmerga.

The Liberals have also adopted seamlessly the hard-right

Harper government's Israel policy. Apart from the United States, no other major power aligns itself so consistently with the Israeli government. At the United Nations, the Trudeau government has a record of joining with the US and a handful of tiny Pacific island states in opposing any criticism of Israel. In December 2016, Canada voted with the US, Israel, Micronesia, Palau and the Marshall Islands to reject a resolution guaranteeing Geneva Convention protections to Palestinian residents in the Occupied Territories. 169 countries supported the resolution. Ottawa has also opposed UN motions calling for a two-state solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, ending the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as soon as possible, and ensuring Palestinians' "inalienable rights."

Significantly, Canada also voted against a UN resolution urging Israel to respect Jerusalem's international status, which has been in place since 1947. Earlier this month, Canada rejected a second resolution appealing to Israel to disavow its occupation and annexation of Arab East Jerusalem, even as rumours circulated that Trump was set to make his announcement.

These pro-Israel positions are bound up with the Canadian ruling elite's close ties with the right-wing regime in Tel Aviv and other pro-US states in the Middle East like Saudi Arabia. Last year, Canada became the second-largest weapons exporter to the region, with only the US selling more arms. Illustrating Canada's rise as an important military partner for the despotic oil Gulf sheikdoms, the Trudeau government approved a \$15 billion deal to supply Riyadh with armoured vehicles, even though credible evidence has emerged that the Canadian-made equipment is being used to bloodily suppress domestic opposition and wage war in Yemen.

Canadian-Israeli cooperation, much of which remains shrouded in secrecy, is also extensive. According to a 2012 *Canadian Press* report, Ottawa and Tel Aviv have deals on a number of defence and intelligence projects. Canadian and Israeli intelligence share classified information, military science and technology research, and details on defence procurement. When Canada went shopping for drones during its involvement in the Afghan war, it selected the Israeli-made Heron. The article also noted that the Canadian Air Force "is looking at deepening relations with Israel given its modern and dynamic Air Force."

Canadian-Israeli trade has more than tripled since 1997, when Ottawa and Tel Aviv concluded a bilateral trade agreement, rising from around \$500 million to over \$1.5 billion.

Given these substantial strategic, military and economic interests, it should come as no surprise that Canada's political establishment fully endorses Ottawa's pro-Israel

stance.

In February last year, Trudeau's Liberals united with the Conservatives to adopt a resolution condemning the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement for its "demonization and delegitimization of the state of Israel." Numerous politicians justified this brazen attack on democratic rights with the spurious claim that the supporters of BDS are anti-Semites.

Notwithstanding the false political perspective advanced by BDS, which blames the entire Israeli population for the policies pursued by the Israeli ruling class and rules out the possibility of uniting Arab and Jewish workers in a common struggle based on a socialist program, the fact that the Trudeau government was cheered on by the most right-wing sections of the Canadian corporate media, including the *Toronto Sun*, and by the Netanyahu government itself underscores the ban's reactionary character. A similar ban voted on by the Ontario provincial legislature in December 2016 won support from a majority of New Democratic Party (NDP) MPPs.

During the 2015 federal election campaign, the NDP purged candidates who had made pro-Palestinian statements or criticized Israel in the past.

And in 2014, when at least 2,000 Palestinian civilians lost their lives in Israel's ruthless bombardment of Gaza, NDP leader Thomas Mulcair dismissed any criticism of the Israeli regime. Mulcair instead focused his ire on Hamas rocket attacks, which killed only a handful of Israelis, describing them as "utterly unacceptable." This won him and his party praise from the neoconservative *National Post*, which applauded "a New Democratic Party that has matured."

Trudeau, who was Liberal leader at the time, hailed the bloodbath carried out by Israel as "justifiable self-defence."

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