

Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital deepens crisis of Arab leaders

By Jean Shaoul
20 December 2017

On Friday, Israeli soldiers killed at least four Palestinians and injured hundreds more in clashes in East Jerusalem and the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including wheelchair-bound Ibrahim Abu Thurayeh, 29, who has no legs. It happened as thousands of Palestinians took to the streets after Friday prayers to protest the decision of US President Donald Trump to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Israeli security forces, which fired tear-gas, stun grenades and rubber-coated steel bullets against the protestors, have killed 10 Palestinians, injured 1,933 and arrested at least 260 since Trump announced his decision on December 6.

The move, overturning decades of official US policy, marks an end to the charade of the so-called “two-state solution” inaugurated under the 1993 Oslo Accords. It has precipitated a political crisis for the Palestinian Authority and all of the Arab regimes, which utilised endless negotiations on realising a truncated state as a cover for their betrayal of the Palestinian people.

The Oslo Accords established the Palestinian bourgeoisie as masters of a semi-state apparatus and a police force to be used against workers and poor farmers. In contrast, the wealth of a tiny layer of Palestinian businessmen soared, in large part thanks to handouts from the imperialist and regional powers.

The promise of a Palestinian state—on non-contiguous pieces of land to be negotiated under the auspices of US imperialism—facilitated the reality of expanding Israeli settlements and the decimation of the Palestinians' social, economic and political conditions.

Trump's announcement has given the green light to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition government to step up its suppression of the Palestinians and its ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from East Jerusalem.

Neither Fatah, the dominant faction in the Palestinian

Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Palestinian Authority (PA), which has ruled the West Bank since 1994, nor its Islamist rival, Hamas, which has ruled the besieged Gaza Strip since 2006, commands significant popular support.

The 82-year-old Mahmoud Abbas assumed the presidency of the PA after Yasser Arafat's death, under highly suspicious circumstances, in 2004. Abbas resurrected the peace talks that Arafat had rejected in 2000 as an abject surrender to Israel. However, there have been no genuine negotiations since then. Everyone now knows there never will be, thanks to Trump. A recent opinion poll found that 67 percent of Palestinians want Abbas to resign.

Saeb Erekat, a former Palestinian negotiator, squirmed in his efforts to cover the PA's exposed rear. “Unfortunately, President Trump just destroyed any possibility of two states,” he complained. The only alternative, he said, was a one-state solution with equal democratic rights for all. This is a pipedream within the framework of the existing imperialist carve-up of the Middle East and the political domination of the Palestinian and Arab bourgeoisie. In practical terms, it expresses the striving of the Palestinian bourgeoisie for a deal with the Zionist regime in Israel and Washington within which it would be guaranteed a share of the economic and political spoils.

Hamas too has sought the support of various regional powers to push for the creation of a Palestinian mini-state, but its room for manoeuvre has been severely curtailed by the defeat suffered by its parent organisation, the Muslim Brotherhood, in Egypt, its growing alienation from Iran and Syria over its support for the US-backed Islamist insurgency against the Assad regime in Syria, and the siege led by Saudi Arabia and Egypt against Hamas's patron, Qatar.

Hamas has been backed by Turkey, but it is being

pushed ever more firmly into the same orbit as Fatah—around Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Trump’s announcement on Jerusalem follows on the heels of Hamas’s announced reconciliation with the PA and its offer to share the governance of Gaza.

Hamas thus plays the same essential role as its secular rival—as a mechanism through which the Palestinians are policed and their plight utilised by the Arab regimes as part of their bargaining with Washington and other imperialist powers.

Following Trump’s announcement on Jerusalem, Hamas made the pro-forma call for “days of rage” and a new intifada that would again pit an essentially defenceless people against the most powerful armed force in the region. But many within Palestine recognise the dead end into which they have been led after two failed intifadas and numerous military assaults that only increased their suffering.

The Arab regimes have issued the required statements opposing Trump’s decision, but their chief concern is that it “needlessly stirred more conflict in an already volatile region” and focused opposition to their own rule.

Egypt’s military junta, headed by Abdul Fattah el-Sisi, made sure the media and the clerical establishment downplayed Trump’s announcement so as not to further inflame tensions already running high due to soaring food prices, unemployment and poverty. El-Sisi has banned rallies, including one outside the Arab League headquarters in downtown Cairo on December 9, when an emergency meeting of foreign ministers met to coordinate the response to Washington.

El-Sisi withdrew his generals from the Gaza Strip, where they were trying to further the reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah, to make it clear that Cairo did not support Hamas’s response to the announcement.

No less compromised is Saudi Arabia. The feudal monarchy is seeking to build an alliance with Israel in line with US imperialism’s preparations for a regional war with Iran, their regional rival. Trump has spoken of the “really good feeling towards Israel” in Saudi Arabia following his visit to both countries in May. Crown Prince Muhammed Bin Salman told Trump that while Riyadh publicly objects to Washington’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and the US embassy’s relocation to Jerusalem, neither is a bar to Saudi engagement with Israel or detrimental to Israel’s moves in the Middle East.

Salman summoned Abbas to Riyadh last month, where he dictated the terms of a US-Israeli “peace” that would

leave Jerusalem and virtually all of the West Bank settlements in Israeli hands and deny Palestinian refugees the right of return to a state whose borders would remain under Israeli control. It followed a secret visit by the Saudi crown prince to Israel in September for discussions with Netanyahu, unprecedented Saudi calls for normalisation with Israel and an informal economic rapprochement with visits by Saudi businessmen.

Last month, Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Gadi Eisenkot said that Israel was ready to share “intelligence information” with Saudi Arabia, as they both had a common interest in standing up to Iran. A few days later, Israeli Communications Minister Ayoub Kara issued an invitation to Saudi Arabia’s Grand Mufti Abdul Aziz al-Sheikh to visit Israel.

Last week, Israel received a 25-strong delegation from the interfaith group “This is Bahrain,” which was on a five-day tour of religious sites in Israel. Its mission to convey a “message of peace” to Israel apparently had the support of King Hamid of Bahrain, whose fragile control of his throne is dependent on Saudi Arabia’s armed forces. A delegation of Israeli business leaders is to visit Bahrain in January. Israel has backed Riyadh’s blockade on Qatar.

Trump’s announcement on Jerusalem points to the growing danger not only of renewed and bloody conflict between Israel and Palestine, but of a regional war, in which Arab, Jewish, Iranian and other national and ethnic groups will be pitted against each other.

The only way forward is the adoption of a perspective for the unification of the working class and poor peasants across all national divisions against their common enemy—the imperialist powers and the corrupt bourgeois regimes through which they exercise ultimate control. The goal must be to bring an end to the division of the region into hostile nation states based on the brutal exploitation of its peoples and the forging of the United Socialist States of the Middle East.

To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>