

How Trump Kills the 'Two-State Solution'

President-elect Trump's choice of a backer of Israeli settlements to be ambassador to Israel may be the final death-blow to the "two-state solution," which has been on its death bed for years, as Dennis J Bernstein explains.

By Dennis J Bernstein

The possibility of a meaningful peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians has taken another dark turn with President-elect Donald Trump's choice of lawyer David Friedman, who holds hardline views in favor of Israeli settlements on Palestinian lands, to serve as the next U.S. ambassador to Israel.

In a statement from the Trump transition team, Friedman also said he "looked forward to moving the U.S. embassy to Israel's eternal capital, Jerusalem," which once was supposed to be divided between Jewish and Palestinian control.

But a different twist to Trump's ambassadorial choice could be that it will kill off the illusion of a "two-state solution," a mirage that has receded farther into the distance as over a half million Jewish settlers moved onto what was intended to be the territory of a Palestinian state. That, in turn, would confront Israel with the choice of a "one-state solution" that grants both Jews and Arabs equal rights or an "apartheid state," which denies rights to Palestinians or treats them as second-class citizens.

I spoke about Trump's choice for U.S. ambassador to Israel and the risks of Trump's emerging Israeli policies with Ali Abunimah, the author of *One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli/Palestinian Impasse*. He is the co-founder and director of the Electronic Intifada, and the winner of many human rights awards. A resident of Chicago, he contributes regularly to the *The Chicago Tribune* and *The Los Angeles Times*.

Dennis Bernstein: Ali, it's good to talk to you again, but the news is not so good for you. You want to begin with your understanding of who David Friedman is...?

Ali Abunimah: Well, Friedman is ... a bankruptcy lawyer. He's Donald Trump's personal lawyer, for the past 15 years, and his campaign adviser on Israel. His views are so hardline that he's been described as being even to the right of Benjamin Netanyahu, which tells you something. In fact, Friedman is the president of a non-profit that has raised about \$10 million over the last five years to directly fund Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank.

And, in fact, that organization is named as a defendant in a lawsuit that was filed earlier this year in federal court by 20 Palestinians against American organizations and individuals who are raising money for settlements. And not just for building settlements, but for buying weapons...

The lawsuit alleges that these organizations are basically involved in money laundering, arms trafficking, and aiding and abetting murder, maiming, theft of Palestinian private property, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and other acts, which are illegal under U.S. and international law. So that lawsuit is currently underway. And Friedman is the president of one of the defendants. And we reported... on the Electronic Intifada [on Dec. 16], that that fact had not been picked up anywhere else.

Friedman, you know, to some extent it would be a repudiation, if Trump's policy moves in the direction that Friedman would advocate, which is outright Israeli annexation of the West Bank, of course, even more settlement construction and moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, that would be a major rhetorical shift in U.S. policy.

But to tell you the truth, Dennis, that's really where we already are in practice. If you look at the reality of where we are, the Israelis have been building settlements, effectively annexing the West Bank with total impunity. And not just impunity, with the full support of every U.S. administration, and not least the Obama administration, which in September signed off on an unconditional 10 year, \$38 billion minimum, guaranteed, military aid package. I mean \$38 billion is the minimum. It's not the total package, because they can still come back for more. That greatly increases the current U.S. aid to Israel.

So, part of me is saying, well this is simply a more honest labeling of what the U.S. policy already is. There was not going to be a two-state solution, even if Hillary was elected. There was not going to be any real consequences for Israeli settlements. So, I think this is another horrible sign of where our country is on so many issues.

But I think it's an opportunity, also, for us to say to people, "Well, you can't pretend there's a peace process anymore, so why aren't you signing up to BDS—boycott, divestment and sanctions—and other campaigns and tactics that are independent of what the government does?" The real people power to begin to hold Israel accountable and change its situation. I think that's both the challenge and opportunity that's put in front of us.

DB: I guess it does look... that's about right. That this will simply... under Trump, they will just draw the line deeper, harder and darker, in terms of what the policy is. But the policy, it hasn't changed in decades. And it doesn't seem

to be changing.

[...] Earlier this year David Friedman referred to a progressive Jewish advocacy group... I guess at J Street... he called them "worse than kapos"... those are the Jewish collaborators with the Nazis, for supporting a two-state solution. They were acting like Nazis.

AA: And he's called President Obama an anti-Semite, as well, [...] who signed the biggest, military aid package in history, to any country in the world, for Israel. Just a few months ago, he called him an anti-Semite. Yeah, so I mean it's horrific, that sort of language, using the term kapos is disgusting. But I think what that does is it confronts all of us with the reality of where Israel and pro-Israel politics have brought us.

And I think it challenges all decent people to, you know, to take a stand. Where are we? I think that the Obama era provided this kind of safe space for people to do nothing to challenge Israel, but say, "Well, I support the peace process, I support the two-state solution." When in reality, we weren't moving towards any kind of peace, and Israel was getting away with what it wants to do.

I think that Friedman is speaking the real position of where Israel is today. And it's ugly... it's ugly. And it's the real face of Israel that Palestinians have always known. So, you know, I mean that's another way to put it. As a Palestinian, I'd say to people who are shocked by this, I'd say, "Welcome to the club." Because you're seeing the face of Israel that we've always seen and lived with.

DB: I do want you to talk a couple minutes about the significance of Jerusalem. You can say something about what's been going on in terms of the purging. But why this is such an outrageous policy decision and what it means in real terms, and in spiritual, political terms, for Palestinians.

AA: Well, Jerusalem, for those [who don't] know, a 30 second history: In 1948 the western part of Jerusalem was ethnically cleansed of its Palestinian population, when Israel was created. And the eastern part of Jerusalem was occupied in 1967 [by Israeli forces]. And the eastern part is part of the West Bank. So the position on West Jerusalem, of the U.S. and all other countries, is that we recognize Israeli de facto control, but we don't recognize it as Israel's capital because that has to be decided as part of a final peace settlement. So, that's why every country in the world has its embassy in Tel-Aviv.

Now, as far as East Jerusalem is concerned, also every country in the world, they don't recognize Israel's sovereignty there, and they say this is occupied

territory. Israel's position since 1967 has been that "we own all of Jerusalem, and we're going to make it so." And so Palestinians in Jerusalem are gradually being pushed out. Settlements have been built everywhere. Land confiscated, the theft of vast areas of Palestinian land. Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem, cut off from each other by Israel's apartheid walls, thousands of Palestinian Jerusalemites deprived of their residence.

Now, all Palestinians in Jerusalem, Israel doesn't even treat them as if they belong there. It treats them as if they are just permanent residents from somewhere else. And their residency can be revoked, at any time. That's been the policy for many years. Aggressively going after Palestinians to get them out of the city.

And so, Palestinians are really hanging on tooth and nail, to stay in their city. [At] the same time Israel has been aggressively erasing all the culture of the city that... doesn't support its Jewish Nationalist narrative. So, you know, it's shut down hundreds of Palestinian cultural institutions. Of course, Jerusalem is a living city, but it's also a symbolic city in terms of the holy places of Christians and Muslims, and, indeed, Jews. But Israel's position is that the Jews are the people who have the most rights there.

And so, we see more and more restrictions. Millions of Palestinian Muslims and Christians don't have access to the city to worship. Christmas time, coming up, just something like a hundred Palestinians from Gaza are going to be granted special permits to visit Jerusalem. It's outrageous, that Palestinians are shut out of this city that is so important to them culturally, and economically, and spiritually.

So it's in that context that you have to see the potential move of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. It would be sort of a full American endorsement of these aggressive and illegal and violent Israeli policies to reshape the city, as kind of a Jewish theme park, rather than a living city for all its people.

But on the other hand, as I have said, I mean the U.S. policy has allowed all this to happen [for] so many decades that, you know, part of me is just to greet it with a shrug. And say, "Well, after all that's happened, I'm not more mad about the embassy than I am about all the other things that Israel has been doing, with the support of Democratic and Republican administrations for decades."

DB: Alright, and just finally, to underscore what might be coming [from]... this appointment. David Friedman has a very close relationship with... the settler movement. As you said, he's for going all the way. In Jerusalem you have the situation where, you know, the Israelis just show up. People are given a little

bit of time and they are ordered out of their house and it's blown up, because they say they don't have the proper documentation. That it's really not the people's property who have lived there for 40 million generations. Forgive me.

But in the case of the settlers in the West Bank, this is a very, very violent movement that is sustained by the Israeli military to a great expense of the United States government, that arms a lot of these structures and supports it. Could you remind people how violent the settlers are at this point, and what's that like? ... Having your house blown up, living with settlers who can do anything they want, right?

AA: They can, and with total impunity. I mean there is seldom any... [punishment for the] hundreds of attacks against Palestinians a year. Very violent attacks, against Palestinians and their property. And just about total impunity for the settlers.

But the thing I want to stress also, you know, these settlers are extremists. They are racists, and they are violent. But the thing I want to stress is that it's really the Israeli army and the Israeli occupation that makes the presence of the settlements possible.

[...]

And that is what is fully supported by the United States, the U.S. government and every U.S. taxpayer. So, the settlers would not be there without the U.S. funding and without the ten year aid package, that President Obama just signed. So I really want to stress that.

It's not about the few extremist settlers, it's about the core support. And, really, we should be angry that Trump is doing all these things—or we fear he'll do all these things—but who set it up this way?

DB: Right.

AA: I mean, who set it up this way? If the Democrats had done something when they had the chance, Trump wouldn't be able to come in and do all these things, on so many issues, not just Palestine. And that, I think, is the real failure of our political system. ...

I think of Trump as Obama III, the third Obama administration because nothing was done on the wars that Obama has spread around the world, extending executive power to kill people anywhere, on surveillance, Obama hasn't stopped it. On mass incarceration, he's pardoned, yeah, more than other presidents, but you know the prisons are still full of people. We can't complain when Trump comes in and continues what we have been left with.

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of *Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom*. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.
