

Israel-Palestine: Trumped, Part 2: Likud, the GOP, & their Respective Class Interests By Steve Jonas

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As I said at the beginning of Part 1 of this series, as is widely known, President Trump recently declared that the United States recognizes Jerusalem as the capitol of the State of Israel and that he intends to move the US Embassy there as soon as it is feasible to do so. The move is weighed down in symbolism. Among other things, it indicates that the US has in reality given up trying to be an "honest broker" in the never-ending, on-again/off-again talks between the Israeli government and the Palestinians. Of course, it has always been known that the U.S. has never been a diplomatically fully neutral party. But the appearances of that status that successive US governments have tried to maintain, even while providing much maintenance for the Israeli Defense Force, will now largely be a thing of the past. Which is just fine with Trump's soul-mate, Bibi Netanyahu, his party Likud, and the small ultra-"religious" right-wing parties on which Likud is dependent for staying in power. Why?

In the most recent Israeli election (2015), Netanyahu came from behind, in Israeli terms from way behind, to win another term as Prime Minister. How did he do this? By being honest. Although he has in the past said that he was in favor of the "Two-State Solution," "in principle," as is again well-known, at the end of the election campaign, he said that as long as he is Prime Minister there will be no Palestinian state, on any terms. While this clearly has been his position for quite some time, this was the first time he said it in public. Then, again as is well-known, he came out with his racist statements regarding Arab-Israeli citizen voters and voting. This had all been proceeded in the final two weeks leading up to the election by a massive scare campaign, about "the Palestinians" and about "Iranian nukes." In retrospect, how Trump-like.

Although he had been running behind in the polls, these tactics obviously worked. In so doing, Netanyahu stitched together an electoral coalition that itself had been previously somewhat fragmented. But in this case, it now highlights the strains and internecine struggles over sharply competing differences on policy and needs that has underlain Israeli society for quite some time. Not taking into account the Arab-Israeli citizens, among Jewish Israelis there are now two clear rival groupings.

Netanyahu's base is made of up the Sephardim (mainly Jews who came from Arab lands after the State of Israel was established in 1948, distantly descended from the Jews who were expelled from Spain in 1492), the (largely secular) Russian Jews who arrived, starting in the 1970s as the Soviet Union opened up for emigration, the far-right-wing Settlers, who have many U.S. Jews among them, and the far-rightists among the Orthodox Jews. These form the basis of Netanyahu's coalition, lining up behind the main right-wing Israeli party, Likud. The opposing group, now represented by the "Zionist Union" (made up of the old Labor Party and the "left" wing of Netanyahu's party), consists primarily of what are known in Israel as the "WASPs." Yes, folks, only in Israel could you find Jewish Wasps: white, Ashkenazi, sabra (born in Israel), for peace.

Much was written about that election, the tactics Netanyahu used (including his controversial address to the U.S. Congress), what future relations between the U.S. and Israel would be for as long as Barack Obama was President, how Netanyahu might "walk back" some of his campaign statements and proposed policies, and etc. First, let us note that although it has been on the back-burner through a whole series of right-wing governments in Israel, the stirring words of the Israeli Declaration of Independence (Israel has no constitution) on what was to be the multi-cultural nature of the State have clearly been abandoned:

The State of Israel will be: open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and, it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

But central to the understanding of what is going in Israel is understanding what are the class interests that are being represented there. In a very important column, Paul Krugman summed up what the current structure of Israeli society is. Straying far from its original roots with a major emphasis on Zionist socialism, Israel has become a nation that economically mimics the United States in many ways. There is an increasing disparity in income and wealth and its economy is increasingly dominated by a military-industrial complex. Ownership is so concentrated that, Krugman told us, "According to the Bank of Israel , roughly 20 families control companies that account for half the total value of Israel's stock market." As in the United States, income and wealth inequality, and a military-industrial complex, go together.

This is precisely why Netanyahu's party, Likud, and the Repubs. are so closely linked. So closely linked in fact that it was the then Israeli Ambassador to the U.S., one Ron Dermer, who arranged for Netanyahu's 2015 speech to the U.S. Congress, without consulting with the White House. That Mr. Dermer, a former (and perhaps still) U.S. citizen is also a former "Republican operative," should come as no surprise. And as I, along with many others, have pointed out previously, one of the primary interests of the Repubs. is the maintenance of the military-industrial complex. And so, among other things, in both countries we have the focus of the Rightists on the big, bad Persian (Iranian) leopard (the national animal of Iran).

(Apparently some folks regard the Persian cat as the national animal of Iran, but as a long-time cat staffer who once had a half-Persian puss, they are not really very scary. "Cat staffer," you might ask? Well yes. You know the difference between dogs and cats, don't you? Dogs have owners; cats have staff. And believe it or not, just as I was writing this, my beautiful Tabby, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, "Lenny" for short, came walking into my study looking for a pat from his staff. By the way, Lenin himself was a great cat-lover.)