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UN General Assembly repudiates Trump over Jerusalem announcement

The Trump administration suffered a humiliating defeat in the UN General Assembly Thursday as 128 countries condemned the president's December 6 announcement recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The 128-9 vote, with 35 abstentions, reflects the extreme isolation of the United States and increases the prospect of a violent clash in the Middle East.

The vote was preceded by an aggressive campaign of bullying and intimidation by Trump and other officials. On Wednesday, Trump threatened any country who voted against the US with the cut-off of development aid. "They take hundreds of millions of dollars and even billions of dollars, and then they vote against us," Trump said. "Well, we're watching those votes. Let them vote against us. We'll save a lot. We don't care."

US ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley continued the attacks in her speech at the General Assembly yesterday. "The United States will remember this day in which it was singled out for attack in the General Assembly for the very right of exercising our right as a sovereign nation," declared Haley. "And we will remember when so many countries come calling on us, as they so often do, to pay even more and to use our influence for their benefit." She proceeded to arrogantly inform the assembly that regardless of the outcome of the vote, Washington would stick by its policy.

Only Togo, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Palau, Nauru, Guatemala and Honduras sided with the US and Israel in support of recognizing Jerusalem. Thirty-five countries

abstained and 21 were absent from the vote, an indication that Trump and Haley's threats had some impact.

Although the US has often found itself in a small minority with its support for Israel on a series of UN resolutions, the readiness of many states to so explicitly defy the US is an expression of growing inter-imperialist antagonisms and the protracted decline of US capitalism.

Traditional US allies like Britain, France, and Germany, who have tended to abstain on resolutions related to Israel, voted to condemn Trump's announcement. Even Canada, arguably the closest US ally and a country which has voted repeatedly in defense of Israel at the UN, abstained.

The fact that Trump's blustering threats made such little impression and the decisive repudiation of Washington's position only increase the danger that the US could lash out aggressively in the Middle East and trigger a catastrophic regional conflict.

The Trump administration's thuggish and bullying actions are bound up with the resort to the waging of great power conflicts as elaborated earlier this week in Trump's National Security Strategy. Having been engaged in virtually uninterrupted war for over a quarter century, claiming the lives of millions in the process, the American ruling class is now openly contemplating military conflicts on a scale not seen since the two world wars of the 20th century.

Were Trump to carry out his threat to cut financial aid to those states opposed to his line on Jerusalem, it would only further escalate great power tensions over the Middle East. Egypt, Jordan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan all defied Washington by supporting the resolution. The European powers, led by Germany, interpreted the Jerusalem decision as an opportunity to expand their influence in the region at the expense of the US and would rapidly fill the void left behind by a drawdown of US support. Russia and China, the chief obstacles in Washington's aggressive drive to consolidate unchallenged dominance over the energy-rich region, would also seize the opportunity.

The General Assembly vote, which is non-binding, came three days after Haley cast the only vote against the resolution in the Security Council, vetoing its passage.

Trump's Jerusalem decision ended the decades-long fraud of a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict promoted by Washington and the other major imperialist powers. It laid bare the bankruptcy of the bourgeois nationalist perspective which claims that the Palestinians can secure their democratic and social aspirations by achieving a bargain with the imperialist powers.

This was on full display Thursday, as Palestinian Authority officials applauded the passage of a resolution which essentially asserted the status quo under which Israel has ruthlessly oppressed the Palestinian people for decades. PA President Mahmoud Abbas, whose regime has loyally served as a security guard for US imperialism and is widely hated among the Palestinians, celebrated the vote as a “victory for Palestine.”

“We will continue our efforts in the United Nations and at all international forums to put an end to this occupation and to establish our Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital,” added Nabil Abu Rdainah, Abbas’ spokesman.

In reality, Washington has made clear it is not prepared to tolerate the emergence of such a state. The European imperialist powers are no more concerned for the fate of the Palestinians, but are hoping to exploit Washington’s inability to broker a settlement between the Israelis and Palestinians, and the crisis of its military intervention in Syria, to advance their own predatory ambitions in the Middle East.

The bourgeois Arab regimes, which used the General Assembly to attack Trump’s policy, are thoroughly complicit in the terrible conditions faced by the Palestinians. All of these regimes were informed of Trump’s policy announcement in advance. Saudi Arabia, which is keen to win Israeli support for its policy of militarily confronting Iran, reportedly ordered Abbas to Riyadh in November to dictate terms of a settlement to him that involved accepting Israeli control of Jerusalem and reducing Palestinian territory to a few small non-contiguous enclaves.

The Jerusalem decision strengthened the hand of Benjamin Netanyahu’s right-wing government, which has injured over 1,900, arrested over 200 and killed 10 Palestinians in the two weeks since Trump’s speech as Israeli security forces have responded to mass protests with live ammunition. The US decision has also emboldened Tel Aviv to continue flouting international law in the Occupied Territories, including by persisting with its illegal settlement program.

Predictably, Netanyahu went on the offensive following the vote. Blasting the outcome as “preposterous,” he proclaimed that Jerusalem “always was, always will be” Israel’s capital. Trump’s Jerusalem policy is bound up with efforts to construct an anti-Iranian alliance in the Middle East with the aim of preparing for war with Tehran. Since he visited Saudi Arabia in May to deliver a speech to the assembled Arab leaders in which he called for the formation of a Sunni alliance to combat Iran, Trump and his senior officials have escalated tensions with Tehran and its allies at every opportunity.

Trump's recognition of Jerusalem came less than two months after he refused to certify Iranian compliance with the 2015 nuclear accord negotiated under the Obama administration. He has demanded that Congress adopt tougher sanctions, including on the country's ballistic missile program.

The lead-up to Thursday's UN vote only underscored the deepening tensions across the Middle East. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan denounced Trump's threats to curtail financial aid, calling on the international community to teach the US "a good lesson." "Mr Trump, you cannot buy Turkey's democratic will with your dollars. Our decision is clear," he continued. "I call on the whole world: Don't you dare sell your democratic struggle and your will for petty dollars."

While there is no small amount of political posturing in such remarks, with Turkey seeking to exploit the Palestine issue to bolster its position in the region, Erdogan's comments reflect Ankara's growing rift with Washington. Erdogan has met with Russian President Vladimir Putin seven times this year and his government has indicated its intention to purchase a Russian anti-aircraft defense system. In addition, the Turkish government appears set to reach an agreement with Russia and Iran over the presence of Kurdish representatives at peace talks on Syria from which Washington has been largely excluded.