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25.02.2024

Netanyahu outlines plans for de facto Israeli annexation of Gaza



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks at the Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem, Sunday, Feb. 18, 2024. [AP Photo/Ohad Zwigenberg]

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented a document to his war cabinet on Friday entitled “The Day After Hamas Principles.” It outlines what amounts to plans for the de facto annexation of Gaza in the aftermath of Israel’s genocidal war against the Palestinians, as well as tighter control over the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

As the plan declares, Israel will maintain military control indefinitely of “all of the territory west of the Jordan” River. It intends to seize territory inside the Gaza Strip to establish a so-called “security space” along its entire border. The Israeli military has already carried out large-scale demolition of homes and civilian infrastructure in northern Gaza in preparation for creating such a buffer zone.

The document also envisages the creation of an overground and underground “security flank” along Gaza’s southern border with Egypt—the only one not under immediate Israeli control—on the pretext of preventing weapons smuggling. In doing so, Israel would be in full land, sea and air control over Gaza, completing the transformation of the enclave into a giant prison camp.

The Israeli military has laid waste to cities and towns throughout Gaza. One estimate released by the BBC last month suggests that between 144,000 and 175,000 buildings in the enclave have either been damaged or destroyed—that is, between 50 percent and 61 percent of the total.

The Netanyahu plan insists that any reconstruction in Gaza must be contingent on its demilitarisation, by which is meant not simply the removal of weapons, but Israeli supervision and control over the civilian administration and police. It calls for a “comprehensive deradicalisation program in all religious education and social institutions in Gaza...”

Netanyahu intends to replace the Hamas administration inside Gaza with a puppet regime composed of local representatives “who are not affiliated with terrorist countries or groups and are not financially supported by them”—in other words, local stooges who are acceptable to the Israeli regime.

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Any police force in Gaza will also be under the Israeli thumb. Only “local actors with management experience” will be allowed to enforce public order. Such a body “will not be identified with states or bodies that support terror, and will not receive salaries from them.” Of course, it will be Israel that determines which states and bodies are supposedly supportive of terrorism.

In another indication that Israel intends to determine international links with Gaza—in other words, foreign policy—the document declares that Israel will work to shut down the primary relief agency for Palestinians—the 75-year-old United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and replace it with “responsible international aid organisations.”

Israel has seized on unsubstantiated claims that a dozen UNRWA employees of its 12,000-strong workforce in Gaza took part in the Hamas military operation inside southern Israel on October 7. UNRWA has repeatedly warned about the desperate situation confronting the population in Gaza, which is being deliberately starved of basic supplies of food, clean water, medicines and other essentials.

The US and its allies have joined the Israeli campaign against UNRWA by cutting funding to the UN body. UNRWA head Philippe Lazzarini said in a letter to the UN General Assembly on Thursday that the agency had lost \$450 million in funding. He warned: “I fear we are on the edge of a monumental disaster with grave implications for regional peace, security and human rights.”

Citing a map displayed to the UN General Assembly last September showing Gaza and the West Bank inside the borders of Israel, Lazzarini said that Israel’s calls to close UNRWA are “not about the agency’s neutrality.” Rather, he said, “UNRWA’s mandate to provide services to Palestine refugees within this same area is an obstacle to that map becoming a reality.”

Netanyahu’s post-Hamas plan makes clear exactly what the Zionist regime intends to do—the Israeli colonisation of Gaza and the West Bank, followed by ethnic cleansing and ultimately annexation. The plan was accompanied by the announcement that Israel had given the green light for the building of 3,000 new housing units in settlements in the West Bank.

Netanyahu has repeatedly ruled out the so-called “two-state solution.” His latest “day after” document rejects any “unilateral recognition” of a Palestinian state. “Israel utterly rejects international diktats in the matter of a final status arrangement with the Palestinians,” it declares. “Such an arrangement will only be reached in direct negotiations.”

Just as it intends to impose a puppet regime in Gaza, so any “negotiations” for a final status arrangement will be with Palestinians of Israel’s choosing, so as to meet Israeli ends.

The Biden administration’s response to Netanyahu’s plan is utterly hypocritical. Having backed the Zionist regime’s barbaric military operation in Gaza to the hilt—politically, financially and militarily—the White House has attempted to distance itself from the predatory aims of Israel’s war.

While backing the full-scale Israeli invasion of Gaza, the US maintains the fig-leaf that it supports a two-state solution and repeats its calls for the involvement of the conservative

Palestinian Authority in the West Bank in any reconstruction of Gaza. While nominally opposing Israeli plans to construct military buffer zones around Gaza's borders, the US declares that it might support their "temporary" establishment.

The timing of the announcement of Netanyahu's plan is significant, coming as it does on the eve of talks in Paris for a temporary pause or ceasefire in Israel's blitzkrieg in Gaza. Its release has the character of a calculated political provocation aimed at poisoning talks before they even get started. Netanyahu has previously dismissed Hamas proposals for a ceasefire as "delusional."

At the same time, the Israeli bombardment of the city of Rafah, where more than a million Palestinian refugees are clinging precariously to life, is ongoing. The death toll in Gaza continued to rise yesterday to more than 29,400. *Al Jazeera* reported that more than 100 people were killed over the previous 24 hours, including at least 24 people, mainly women and children, when an Israeli strike hit a home sheltering dozens of displaced Palestinians in Deir el-Balah.

That terrible toll is poised to rise dramatically. The fascist Netanyahu regime has delivered an ultimatum declaring that unless all remaining Israeli hostages are released by the beginning of Ramadan, March 10, the military will launch its deadly ground offensive on Rafah to complete its seizure of Gaza.

World Socialist 24.02.2024