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USA/Middle East

Trump and the Middle East: What Lies Ahead?

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Trump's victory in the US presidential race is a major catastrophe for the peoples of the Middle East. It comes on top of the Nakba that has been raging since the Hamas-led 7 October 2023 operation. Benjamin Netanyahu had been eagerly hoping for this victory and did everything he could to contribute to its achievement, whether by inciting his right-wing US allies or by refusing to grant Joe Biden and the Democratic presidential campaign the Gaza truce they had been hoping for in order to provide them with an electoral argument they desperately needed. So, what awaits us now that Trump's return to the White House is confirmed?

The available information – considering Trump's behaviour during his first presidential term, the positions he expressed during his recent campaign, and what has leaked from his circles – indicate that he is keen to appear as a leader who achieves 'peace' in contrast to his portrayal of Biden as a perpetuator of a war he is unable to resolve. While Trump seeks to end wars which he does not see as in America's interest, he remains keen to pursue other goals. Thus, during his previous term, while he negotiated with the Taliban in preparation for the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan and wanted to withdraw the US military cover for the Kurds in Syria at the request of Turkish President Erdogan, he supported the continued presence of his country's forces in Iraq, brazenly expressing his interest in that country's oil wealth.

Peace in Palestine?

And while he expressed his ambition to conclude the 'deal of the century' on Palestine, the 'peace' he proposed was so unfair that Mahmoud Abbas himself rejected it, while Netanyahu welcomed it, realizing that no Palestinian side was capable of accepting the terms of such a 'deal'. Netanyahu hence hoped that the Palestinian rejection of that 'generous' offer would legitimize the Zionist state's further grabbing of the land of Palestine west of the Jordan River. This was in addition to the fact that Trump discarded long-standing official US policy regarding the regional conflict in favour of Israel, from his official approval of the latter's annexation of the occupied Syrian Golan Heights to his transfer of the US embassy to Jerusalem and his closure of the US consulate for the 1967 occupied territories, all of which indicate support for Zionist expansionism. Trump's backed Israel's position towards Iran, tearing up the nuclear agreement that the administration of his predecessor, Barack Obama, had concluded after long and difficult negotiations, and his escalation of military provocation by assassinating Iran's military leaders.

Trump has no interest in supporting Ukraine and would rather reach an agreement with Vladimir Putin that would satisfy the Russian president, whom he admires for his reactionary personality while desiring to invest in his country.

He sees no interest in the alliance with European countries unless they make more economic concessions to the United States and augment their military efforts to get increasingly involved in the US confrontation with China, which Trump sees as America's main competitor (while hostility to China is a fundamental pillar of the ideology of the US imperialist right that he leads). At the same time, it is no secret that Trump sees the Arab Gulf monarchies' oil and oil money as a supreme US interest and the Zionist state as an invaluable ally for its role as watchdog of that supreme interest. For interest in its crudest sense – in which personal and family self-interest prevails over any other consideration.

Lebanon and Iran

On Lebanon, he will likely continue Biden's position of seeking to end the ongoing war on terms that satisfy Israel, based on the withdrawal of Hezbollah forces from the south and the gradual replacement of the party's forces there as well as of Israel's occupying forces by the regular Lebanese army. This would be accompanied by a reinforcement of the Lebanese army such as the balance of power in Lebanon might change, allowing the US-dominated state to prevail over the Iran-dominated party. Of course, Tehran prefers to keep Hezbollah in the fray to allow it to take part in the upcoming confrontation between Iran and the US-Israeli alliance.

Netanyahu is confident that Trump will be more willing than Biden to engage in this confrontation. He has already sent a representative to negotiate with the president-elect on the next steps towards Iran. The likelihood of a joint US-Israeli attack on Iran has become very high indeed with Trump's return to the White House. He will certainly seek to re-establish firm US hegemony over the Gulf region after it was weakened during the Obama and Biden eras.

As for Palestine, Trump is likely to support Israel's official annexation of a significant portion of the West Bank and Gaza (the northern part of the Strip in particular, where 'ethnic cleansing' is presently carried out by the Zionist army) for the expansion of its West Bank settlements and the resumption of their build-up in Gaza. Israel will keep its hold over strategic corridors that allow it to control the remaining Palestinian population concentrations in the two occupied territories. As in the Deal of the Century elaborated by Trump's son-in-law Jared, the transaction will probably include 'compensation' for the Palestinians loss of land and offering them areas in the Negev Desert. Eight months ago, Kushner expressed the opinion that Israel should seize the northern part of the Gaza Strip and invest in developing its 'waterfront'. Once again, this 'deal' takes the Palestinian people for fools and he will find no Palestinian with the slightest credibility willing to accept it. Israel will thus feel allowed to unilaterally impose it by force, while the Zionist far right will keep increasing its pressure for the completion of the 1948 Nakba to annex all Palestinian land between the river and the sea and uproot most of its inhabitants.

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