

A Comic Display of Geopolitical Subservience: Mike Pompeo's Visit to Israel

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Prefatory Note: *Posted below is a greatly modified interview on the entirely inappropriate and distasteful visit of the U.S. Secretary of State to Israel for three days. It was distasteful and regressive to a degree that defied normal levels of its criticism. I would call particular attention to its boastful endorsement of Israel's cruel and unlawful behavior during the Trump presidency, which was harmful to the Palestinian struggle for basic rights and to Palestinian victimization resulting from the Israeli apartheid regime that has been imposed on the Palestinian people as a whole. The interview questions were submitted by the Brazilian journalist Rodrigo Craveiro on behalf of Correio Braziliense on Nov. 20, 2020.*

For me the entire event was a grotesque occasion of national embarrassment from start to finish. Even the most dimwitted imperialist would know better than to declare Pompeo's subservience to Israel in these scary words: "Israel is everything we want the entire Middle East to look like going forward."

It is impossible not to take note of the cruel absurdity of Pompeo's visit to Israel, further ingratiating himself to his Israeli minders by celebrating the lawlessness of the Trump diplomacy of the last four years. It was far more plausible to imagine Netanyahu visiting Washington to bid farewell to his benefactor in the White House, with a side trip to one of Sheldon Adelson's Vegas casinos. An Israeli expression of gratitude to Trump for a level of U.S. Government diplomatic support that went well beyond the pro-Israeli partisanship of prior American leaders would have been annoying but quite understandable. But why would Pompeo want to call attention to such unseemly exploits after enduring a political humiliation at home by a display of homage to the worst excesses of an outlaw foreign country. If given the unsavory task of casting a TV series on theme of 'geopolitical buffoonery' I would look no further than Mike Pompeo for a role model! Even Saturday Night Live would be stymied if they attempted to satirize such obtuse political behavior. Is it any wonder that the only support that Israel could find to oppose the recent 2020 annual General Assembly Resolution affirming the Palestinian right of self-determination and independent sovereign statehood were such pillars of international order as Micronesia, Marshall Islands, and Nauru in the 163-5 vote.

Correio Braziliense: How do you assess the symbolism of this travel of Mike Pompeo to West Bank and to Golan Heights? What kind of message did he want to transmit?

Richard Falk: First of all, the timing of the visit given the outcome of the American

presidential election is mighty strange and beyond suspect, undoubtedly motivated by undisclosed illicit goals. I would call attention to three:

- first, Pompeo is unabashedly positioning himself in relation to the pursuit of the Republican presidential nomination for the 2024 elections, especially burnishing his already incredible credentials as an over-the-top reliable and unconditional supporter of Israel. Presumably, this makes him the best bet to receive financial backing from wealthy militant Zionist donors. To reinforce the claim of doing whatever possible to ingratiate himself with his gloating Israeli hosts, Pompeo delivered a welcome symbolic message by becoming the first U.S. political leader to visit an Israeli settlement during an official visit. He paid a visit to Psagot Settlement which is not far from Ramallah in the West Bank. Psagot operates a winery, which was not bashful about going all out to please Pompeo, bizarrely expressing their gratitude by naming one of their red wines in his honor, which may be a peculiar form of recognition for Pompeo who presents himself at home as a devout Evangelical Christian;
- secondly, to highlight the tangible contributions of the Trump presidency to the realization of maximal Zionist goals, including moving the American Embassy to Jerusalem, intensifying the anti-Iran coalition by increasing sanctions, supporting the annexation of the Golan Heights, brokering the normalization agreement with Arab governments that have ended Israel's regional isolation, legitimating the Israeli settlements, by doing, blurring the distinction between de facto annexation which has been proceeding ever since 1967 and the Israeli goal of extending its sovereignty to at least 30% of the Occupied West Bank, and pledging to commit the U.S. Government to brand the BDS Campaign as 'anti-Semitic'
- thirdly, an incidental part of the Pompeo mission seems designed to inhibit the Biden presidency from making moves to undo the Trump legacy on Israel/Palestine. Netanyahu, AIPAC, and most of the U.S. Congress will scream 'foul play' if Biden makes even slight moves to reverse, or even moderate, Trump's lawlessness, insisting that and departure from the Trump initiatives would be proof of an anti-Israeli policy turn in Washington. Actually, there is no reason to suppose that Biden needs inhibiting when it comes to confronting Israel, except possibly with respect to formal annexation.

CB: What about the fact that Pompeo agreed that products made in West Bank settlements could now be sold in the United States with the notation 'made in is Israel'?

RF: Such a step seems partly designed to box in the Biden presidency and to contrast the U.S. pro-Israeli approach with that of the European Union and the UN. The European Court of Justice recently overturned a French judicial decision allowing labeling of settlement imports as 'made in Israel,' requiring that settlement imports be labeled as 'made in Israeli settlements.' Up until the Trump presidency, the US had not directly challenged the UN view that the settlements were unlawfully established in violation of Article 49(6) of the Fourth Geneva Convention. A few months ago, Pompeo released an official statement declaring, in a break from previous U.S. policy, that the settlements are 'not per se inconsistent with international law.' Such a declaration is inconsistent with a widely endorsed view of the requirements of international humanitarian law, and has no relevance except to show American cynical disregard of the most basic precepts of international law when it comes to

issues bearing on Israel's expansionist policies and Palestinian rights.

CB: Also how do you see fact he told BDS is a antisemitic movement?

RF: Again, Pompeo's gratuitous remark is a gesture of solidarity with the Netanyahu government, and irresponsibly treats the BDS Campaign as antisemitic. Additionally, Pompeo declares an intention to withdraw government support from any organization that supports BDS, thereby threatening funding sources of such leading human rights NGOs as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and also forcing a Biden presidency to face a dilemma of allowing such policy to persist or reversing it, with either course of action producing a strong backlash.

It should be appreciated that BDS is a nonviolent means of exerting pressure on the Israeli Government, and seeks to induce Israel to uphold Palestinian rights under international law. BDS was an effective instrument of pressure on the South African racist apartheid regime in the 1980s. It was widely supported by religious institutions, labor unions, and universities in the United States, and enjoyed the backing of the UN. It also was criticized in investment and conservative circles, but never was it suggested that the anti-apartheid BDS campaign directed at South Africa was somehow immoral, or even unlawful, or was itself racist in character. For Pompeo and others to brand BDS as antisemitic is to confuse a legitimate expression of concern for human rights of the Palestinian people with hatred of Jews. In this sense, what Pompeo did to please Israeli hardliners should be rejected as the worst kind of opportunistic politics that seeks to harm legitimate peaceful political activity in the United States, including advocating punitive action against respected human rights organizations.

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Featured image: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on August 24, 2020 in Jerusalem. (Photo: Pompeo/Twitter)

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