

Capitalist Diplomacy, the US and Israel

In the natural world, different animals – especially those who live in packs, such as wolves – have developed a complex set of signals in order to avoid outright physical confrontation. At some point, however, tensions either within the pack or between different packs can become so great that a fight, sometimes even to the death, cannot be avoided.

The world of capitalist diplomacy can be seen similarly, and the signals being sent by the Israeli and US regimes are one such example. Recently, US vice president Joe Biden visited Israel. Part of the purpose of his visit was to get so-called peace talks between Israel and the (officially recognized) Palestinian leadership started once again. Such talks in the past have yielded nothing but pieces of paper which Israel promptly violated before the ink was even dry on them (especially as far as building the illegal settlements). Under the Bush regimes, the US dropped all pretense of being the “honest peace broker” for the region and simply wrote Israel a blank check. Among other things, this put the US’s Arab allies, such as the Saudi regime, on the spot a little. Therefore, the Obama regime is seeking to return to the previous role. In order to do this, they must push a little on the issue of the settlements.

Biden Visits Israel

Within Israel, however, the politics have shifted even further to the right, with such far-right, nearly openly racist parties as Shas now in the cabinet. Far from accommodating US pressures, they are moving closer to outright ethnic “cleansing” of ever larger portions of the West Bank, and “peace” talks are seen as an obstacle to this goal. Biden’s recent visit illustrates the tactical differences that are developing. This goal of his visit conflicts with that of Shas and other such forces in Israel. Their goal is to stir up as much conflict with the Palestinians as possible in order to justify accelerated ethnic cleansing in the West Bank as well as in Israel itself. Thus, while Biden was in Israel, the ministry of the interior (run by Shas) announced the building of 1600 new settlements in East Jerusalem. This timing clearly intended to undermine the purpose of Biden’s visit. Netanyahu claimed that he didn’t know the announcement was going to be made while Biden was in Israel, and it’s possible that he was telling the truth. He also claimed that the timing of this announcement was an “accident”. This is definitely false.

This diplomatic signal was a slap in the face to the Obama administration, and his administration replied with the unusually blunt comment that the timing was an “insult” to the US. (The fact that it was an announcement of further ethnic cleansing is secondary to the US regime.)

Netanyahu Visits the US

Then, in order to try to repair diplomatic relations, Netanyahu came to the US a few weeks later. However, ever the captive of his right wing bloc, and under the influence of the neo-conservatives in the US, his first act was to give a defiant speech at the annual gathering of the main Israel lobbying group in the US (the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee – AIPAC – considered one of the most potent lobbying groups in the

US). He announced that Israel would continue to build settlements in East Jerusalem, which it considers to be the capital of Israel. As the Israeli columnist Uri Avnery put it, Israel's position could be characterized as follows: *"OK, now that there is agreement about the land we are getting, let's talk about the rest of the land. Mine is mine, now let's negotiate about what is yours."* Then, just in case there was any doubt about the intent of the timing of the settlement-building announcement made when Biden was in Israel, just minutes before Netanyahu was scheduled to meet with Obama, another such announcement was made in Israel of the building of even more settlements. To emphasize: The building of settlements is no surprise as this has continued for decades. Naturally, there would have to be announcements of this, too. The point is that the announcements were timed to mean open defiance of the US. This was another diplomatic slap in the face to the Obama administration, which responded in kind. When Obama and Netanyahu met, Obama refused to pose for the usual photos of the two world leaders sitting or standing together smiling at each other. This was Obama's return signal.

Basis for US Capitalism's Support for Israel

The Israeli regime is counting on two factors: First is the fact that they are indispensable for US capitalism in the region. Second is the political pressure they can bring to bear through such lobbying groups as AIPAC. While AIPAC certainly packs a potent punch, and has been crucial in defeating the few opponents of Israel in congress (such as Cynthia McKinney), they cannot overcome the power of the US capitalist class as a whole, once that class decides on a policy. Up until now, the capitalist class is determined to maintain support for Israel. After all, what other ally do they have in the region whose domestic stability can really be counted on? A few decades ago, they thought they had one such ally in the Shah of Iran, but look how that turned out. Up until now, the US capitalist class has been extremely reluctant to let any serious criticism of the Israeli regime see the light of day. This is because they must maintain a popular base for their support for the Israeli regime.

The Israeli regime has taken full advantage of this by presenting its US (and other Western allies and supporters) with "facts on the ground" as they call them – accomplished facts which the US capitalist representatives then feel obligated to ignore at best or to outright support. When they build settlement after settlement, when they burn alive civilian populations with white phosphorous, when they allow the settlers to beat up little Palestinian children – what can the US politicians say? If they criticize such atrocities, then they run the risk of feeding into a wider anti-Israel sentiment in the US and this would jeopardize their entire support for the Israeli regime. So, time after time, the US capitalist politicians have remained silent (and the US corporate controlled media has covered up the reality).

Although US capitalism's overall support for Israel is unlikely to disappear, its tone may shift in the future. The diplomatic signals of the Obama administration indicate this.

Petraeus's "Doomsday Weapon"

Their problem is how to build a political base from which to openly criticize Israel. The first warning of how such a base may be built – one which would counter AIPAC and

similar forces - was given a few weeks earlier by US General David Petraeus, who is the head of the Central Command of the US army and one of the most influential military strategists in the US. He sent a communication to the Senate Armed Services Committee in which he warned of: *“a perception of U.S. favoritism for Israel. Arab anger over the Palestinian question limits the strength and depth of U.S. partnerships with governments and peoples in the AOR (Area of Responsibility – the Muslim world) and weakens the legitimacy of moderate regimes in the Arab world. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda and other militant groups exploit that anger to mobilize support. The conflict also gives Iran influence in the Arab world through its clients, Lebanese Hizballah and Hamas.”* His implication was that the policies of the State of Israel are putting the lives of US troops at risk. Once the Obama administration and various politicians start beating this drum, the entire Israel lobby will be thrown onto the defensive. It would threaten to stir up a strong anti-Israel sentiment amongst many people in the US. Avnery called this political attack a *“doomsday weapon”* and explained that, *“the sword has (only) been drawn from its scabbard”*, but the very act of drawing it implies its possible use in the future.

Israeli Regime’s Response

How will the Israeli regime respond to these increased criticisms from the US administration (mild as they may be)? Already the far right is in attack mode, the only mode it knows. Netanyahu’s brother issued a comment that Obama is an anti-Semite. At the same time, an “unnamed” representative of the Netanyahu regime is reported to have said that Obama is a “disaster” for Israel. Netanyahu subsequently disavowed this comment, but it is almost certain that it was reported accurately.

As for longer term perspectives for this newly-developing rift: A lot depends on other developments. If US capitalism concludes that it is necessary to attack Iran (which it has shown extreme reluctance to do so far), then it a possible result would be to thrust it closer to Israel. On the other hand, it may be forced to try to further cement its relations with other Arab states, whose ruling circles also have a tendency to see Iran as a rival. The result of this would be to pressure it to further criticize Israel. Domestic political developments also come into play. If the Republican right can make further gains, and possibly even recapture the White House, this would strengthen the uncritical supporters of Israel.

Within Israel, it is difficult to tell the result. The far right parties seem to be increasing in their influence. The approach of these parties is to attack, attack, attack. While the entire Israeli regime has always used the strategy of “creating facts on the ground” (for example, continually building settlements), the far right takes this as a matter of principle. It is possible that if they increase their influence, they could initiate a unilateral attack on Iran, thus presenting US capitalism with a *fait accompli*.

In any case, just like the raised hackles and stiff legged walk of wolves are intended to both avoid outright confrontation but also serve to warn that such confrontation is possible, so these diplomatic rumblings warn of the possibilities to come.



Obama & Netanyahu meet in May, 2009 – the obligatory photo



No such photo for their March, 2010 meeting