

A Big Change Is Underway

Trump Muscles Netanyahu, Biden ‘Discovers’ the Oligarchy

by Harley Schlanger

Jan. 18—In her opening statement to the weekly International Peace Coalition Zoom call on January 17, Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp-LaRouche said that the announcement of an agreement between Israel and Hamas for a ceasefire in Gaza and swapping of hostages is a sign of “a remarkable shift that is underway.” Acknowledging that there are still many obstacles to establishing a lasting peace in the region, she declared that this “is definitely a very important step in the right direction.”

Zepp-LaRouche’s assessment that incoming U.S. President Donald Trump played an instrumental role in making this happen is shared by many analysts, including some who had previously little positive to say about him. Since the Hamas strike against Israel on October 7, 2023, Trump had made numerous statements supporting Israel’s right to self-defense, insisting that the Israeli military should “finish the job” and then move on. This was taken to mean that Trump was giving full support to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu’s vow that he would destroy Hamas.

But it appears that Trump’s patience with Netanyahu was wearing out, as the brutal assault against the Palestinians in Gaza—which has been credibly described as a “genocide”—has continued, and Israel Defense Forces (IDF) advanced into Lebanon and have conducted lethal military strikes in Syria and Iran. With his inauguration approaching, and the Biden-Blinken appeals to Netanyahu making no progress, Trump intervened directly, apparently with the approval of the flailing Biden administration.

On January 7, he said at a press conference that if negotiations for a ceasefire do not succeed, “All hell will break out. If those hostages aren’t back, I don’t want to hurt your negotiation, if they’re not back by the time I get into office, all hell will break out in the Middle East.”

Though many assumed his words were aimed at Hamas, it became evident that he was also addressing Netanyahu when he posted on his Truth Social account

on January 9 comments from Columbia University professor and economist Jeffrey Sachs, which included a scathing attack against the Israeli Prime Minister. Referring to Netanyahu as a “deep dark son of a bitch,” Sachs said that from 1995 onward, he had operated on the theory “that the only way we’re going to get rid of Hamas and Hezbollah is by toppling the governments that support them. That’s Iraq, Iran and Syria. The guy is nothing if not obsessive. He’s gotten us into endless wars and because of the power of all of this in U.S. politics, he’s gotten his way.”

An article in *Politico* on January 17 went so far as



PM of Israel Facebook

Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Prime Minister

to declare in its headline that Trump was “the closer” in the ceasefire deal. Among those cited making this claim was former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who told *Politico* that Trump was also addressing Netanyahu. Olmert said that Trump’s threat moved Netanyahu to accept the ceasefire, as he “is afraid of Trump.” Similar comments were made by representatives from the European Council of Foreign Relations and from Chatham House, institutions which previously had been ardent defenders of Ne-

tanyahu's murderous hard-line approach.

Enter Steve Witkoff

A central figure in Netanyahu's acceptance of a ceasefire is Steve Witkoff, a billionaire real estate investor and long-time friend of Trump, who was designated the incoming envoy to the Middle East. Witkoff took a no-nonsense approach in negotiations, insisting, according to sources, that Trump wanted to get this done and expected Netanyahu to accept a deal. According to Blinken's spokesman, Matt Miller, Witkoff "has been absolutely critical in getting this deal over the line."

That Team Biden was unable to accomplish this in fifteen months, and even had presented last May the same deal to Netanyahu that was rejected then, but accepted now, has led to questions as to whether Trump offered Netanyahu a quid pro quo for signing. In the absence of any compelling evidence that there was such a secret deal, what is known is that U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken refused to apply to Netanyahu the ultimate leverage he had, that he either accept this deal and stop the killing, or U.S. aid would be cut off. Witkoff may have been more forceful in presenting the negative consequences should Netanyahu refuse the offer this time.

Phase I of the agreement begins on January 19, with the first three Israeli hostages released in return for Israel releasing Palestinian prisoners. The ceasefire is set for 42 days, during which Hamas will release a total of 33 hostages, and IDF troops are to begin a withdrawal from Gaza. Trump said he will use the Gaza ceasefire to create momentum to expand the Abraham Accords, with a renewed focus on establishing diplomatic relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia. This will be a test of whether the Gaza deal is ultimately successful in creating a sustainable peace, as the Saudis have insisted that the Accords include the end of the occupation of Palestinian lands, and the establishment of a Palestinian state—both of which have been rejected repeatedly by Netanyahu and his Greater Israel allies.

Biden's Last Hurrah!

As for President Joe Biden, he is claiming that the deal is his triumph, as he had invested so much time



White House

Steve Witkoff, President Trump's Middle East envoy.

and effort to achieve it. He ticked it off as one of his administration's accomplishments during his "Farewell Address," in which he tried to recycle President Eisenhower's famous warning of the dangers of the "acquisition of unwarranted influence ... by the military-industrial complex" to imply that it was the emergence of an "oligarchy" he called the "tech-industrial complex," which threatens American "democracy" and undermined him!

There is a "dangerous concentration of power in the hand of a very few ultra-wealthy people," he said, which "threatens our entire democracy, our basic rights and freedoms...." This oligarchy is responsible for "an avalanche of mis-

information and disinformation, enabling the abuse of power."

That Biden issued this warning as the Gaza peace agreement was being finalized is part of the tragic irony of his political career, culminating in his failed presidency. Though he engaged in an occasional public plea to Netanyahu for more humanitarian treatment of the Palestinians in Gaza, his policy of continuing to provide arms, money, and political cover for Israel's policy of "ethnic cleansing" made the U.S. complicit in genocide. In the same way, his administration's rejection of negotiations with Russian President Vladimir Putin for mutual security for Russia and Ukraine, and the U.S. role in scuttling the peace agreement reached in April 2022 between Russia and Ukraine—while spending hundreds of billions of U.S. taxpayers' dollars to arm Ukraine and run its government poured funds into a military-defense oligarchy he had apparently overlooked—are responsible for hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian deaths.

Yet he and Blinken and the rest of his team have thus far escaped any measure of accountability for their war crimes. It remains to be seen if President-elect Trump will have learned from the catastrophic outcome of Biden's presidency that the road to peace depends on breaking the power of the broad military-industrial-financial complex and their geopolitical addiction to war and plunder. Building on the Gaza ceasefire would be, as Mrs. Zepp-LaRouche said, a "very important step in the right direction."