**Pompeo says Israel has biblical claim to Palestine and is ‘not an occupying nation’**

Trump’s secretary of state makes comments on podcast to defend former administration siding more openly with Israel

Chris McGreal in New York (The Guardian, 16/2/2023)

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( [https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/feb/16/mike-pompeo-israel-biblical-claim-palestine-not-occupying?CMP=Share\_iOSApp\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/feb/16/mike-pompeo-israel-biblical-claim-palestine-not-occupying?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other%20) )

Mike Pompeo, the former US secretary of state, has defended Israel’s decades-long control of the Palestinian territories by claiming that the Jewish state has a biblical claim to the land and is therefore not occupying it.

Pompeo told the One Decision podcast that his religious beliefs, US strategic interests and his view of the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, as a “known terrorist” underpinned his support as the Trump administration’s top diplomat for the shift in US policy away from mediating a two-state solution and toward more openly siding with Israel.

“[Israel] is not an occupying nation. As an evangelical Christian, I am convinced by my reading of the Bible that 3,000 years on now, in spite of the denial of so many, [this land] is the rightful homeland of the Jewish people,” he said.

Pompeo, who referred to the occupied West Bank by its Israeli name of Judea and Samaria, declined to support a two-state solution of an independent Palestine alongside Israel – an increasingly diminishing prospect after years of failed negotiations and the rise to power of politicians in Israel who advocate annexing the occupied territories.

“I’m for an outcome that guarantees Israeli security and makes the lives better for everyone in the region,” he said.

Pompeo, who once suggested that God sent Trump to save Israel, was speaking ahead of publication of a book, Never Give an Inch: Fighting for the America I Love, that has fuelled speculation he is laying the groundwork for a presidential run.

As secretary of state he reversed a number of longstanding US policies, including overturning legal advice from 1978 that declared Israel’s settlements in the West Bank “inconsistent with international law”. Most western governments, such as the UK, say the settlements and Israel’s annexation of occupied East Jerusalem are a breach of the Geneva conventions and are therefore illegal.

Pompeo was Trump’s CIA director before his appointment as secretary of state in 2018. He played an instrumental role in an administration that recognised Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and moved the US embassy to that city from Tel Aviv. The move was widely criticised, including by Washington’s allies, as pre-empting a final agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

Pompeo said it is in the US’s interests to back Israel whatever its policies, and he blamed the Palestinians for the failure of peace negotiations.

“What’s in America’s best interest? Is it to sit and wait for Abu Mazen [Abbas], a known terrorist who’s killed lots and lots of people, including Americans … to draw a line on a map? That’s what the state department would do,” he said.

“The previous secretary of state ran back and forth from Tel Aviv to Ramallah and tried to draw lines on a map. We said: ‘That’s not in America’s best interest. Let’s go create peace,’ and we did.”

Pompeo was part of the Trump administration team that negotiated the Abraham accords normalisation agreements between Israel and several formerly hostile countries, including the United Arab Emirates, Morocco and Sudan. At the time he said the accords were part of the administration’s efforts to ensure that “that this Jewish state remains”.

“I am confident that the Lord is at work here,” he said.