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U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin hold a joint news conference after their July 16 meeting in Helsinki, Finland. (CNS/Reuters/Leonhard Foeger)

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As the Trump presidency nears its two-year mark, the president has antagonized, insulted and diminished traditional U.S. allies at a rate unprecedented in modern history. With two world leaders, however, Trump has demonstrated a close affinity.

The first is Russian President Vladimir Putin, whom Trump has showered with gushing and fawning compliments. The second is Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Trump's bond with Netanyahu is both transactional and politically expedient. It is also ideological in the sense that both leaders utilize nationalism, authoritarianism, populism and self-victimization as political weapons.

The intersection of these three leaders and their shared interests was put on stark display by the July 16 Helsinki summit between Trump and Putin; Netanyahu seems to have irrevocably thrown his lot in with both presidents in what he has determined is in Israel's security interest.

Netanyahu said he greatly appreciated "the things that President Putin said about the need to honor the 1974 separation agreements between Syria and Israel, just as I appreciate the security cooperation between the militaries of Russia and Israel."

Netanyahu traveled to Russia a few days before the Helsinki summit for his third meeting in six months with Putin to press for getting Iran out of Syria. Trump confirmed at Helsinki that he and Putin are on the same page in this regard. " 'We both spoke with Bibi (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu) and they would like to do certain things with Syria having to do with the safety of Israel,' Trump said. 'Russia and the United States will work jointly (in this regard). Creating safety for Israel is something both Putin and I would like to see very much.' "

The calculation Netanyahu has made regarding Putin and Russia is that Russia can be convinced to push Iran out of Syria or at least substantially limit its military presence. This in turn would dramatically reduce the risk posed to Israel from Iranian missiles and its allied militia in Syria.

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A New Yorker article has detailed how Israel has been pushing Trump to accept a "grand bargain" over Syria, in which the U.S. would drop sanctions imposed in the

wake of Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in exchange for Russia removing the Iranian presence from Syria.

Israel has been encouraged by the fact that for the past three years there has been a quid pro quo with Russia allowing it to successfully target Iranian weapons and forces in Syria while painstakingly avoiding harming Russian troops in the country as well as not seriously undermining the Syrian regime.

Making the logical leap from Russia allowing Israel to conduct limited strikes on Iran to Russian and American acquiescence to a grand bargain is a deep misreading of the situation. For one, such a bargain would rely solely on trusting the word of one person, Putin. Such a deal leaves Russia as the sole determining actor in Syria. Constraining Iran may serve Putin's interests for now, but if Putin determines in the future that he could gain further regional advantage by being more permissive to Iranian ambitions, nothing will stop him from doing so.

Additionally, trading "Ukraine for Syria" is fraught with strategic miscalculations. A grand bargain that constrains Iran gives Russia in return a free hand in Eastern and Central Europe. This would bode ill for the Baltic States and other countries that Putin seeks to dominate, severely testing NATO, the Western alliance that has anchored European security for 70 years. Neither Europe nor the American political establishment, despite Trump, would allow the weakening or even dismantlement of NATO as the price of removing Iran from Syria.

Iran similarly plays a large part in Netanyahu's calculus in aligning himself with Trump and a Republican party currently remolded in Trump's image. Trump's demeaning ridicule of Muslims, Hispanics, Arabs, Europeans and immigrants, and his unleashing of populist and nationalist passions that encourage racists and anti-Semites is irrelevant because Trump is a true friend of Israel.

Trump has moved the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, pulled the U.S. out of the Iran nuclear deal and put the Palestinians "in their place." Additionally, Trump's ambassador in Israel is a documented supporter of Israeli settlements, unconcerned about Israel's activities in the West Bank and never critical of any action of the right wing Israeli government.

These steps do not translate into American willingness to put "boots on the ground" against Iran. Trump's primary concerns are self-advancement and political survival, and if these intersect with support for Israel against Iran, so be it. However, Trump

has deep reservations about significant American military involvement overseas, and if Iran returns to nuclear enrichment, America will not act militarily.

Added to these reservations is Trump's Putin obsession. Putin values his relationship with Iran, and given Trump's refusal to condemn Putin for the unanimous intelligence community's consensus that Russia engaged and continues to engage in information warfare to undermine American democracy, it is very doubtful that Trump would bomb Iran against Putin's objections.

Trump's Helsinki summit came on the heels of a European trip that was breathtaking in the damage he inflicted. It should serve as a warning to Netanyahu that Trump will not hesitate to insult, denigrate and even betray America's allies even close ones such as NATO, Germany and the United Kingdom. Trump has labeled the European Union a "foe" while insisting that Russia is only a "competitor." Even the U.S. has not escaped his wrath. Before meeting Putin, Trump accused the United States of being "foolish" in wrecking relations between the U.S. and Russia, as if he were a separate entity from the country he leads.

Israel should not think it will remain exempt. Israel would do well to remember that it is dealing with an American president who feels no loyalty to anyone but himself, even siding with Putin over his own intelligence agencies in his obsession to reject anything that casts doubts on the legitimacy of his election as president. Such a president would not hesitate to turn his back on Netanyahu if it served his narrow definition of American interests.

Under Netanyahu, Israel has chosen a path of short-term gain while ignoring potential long-term pain. By unequivocally aligning with Trump alone, Israel by default aligns itself against large segments of the U.S. and world public opinion that abhors the American president. Americans will eventually be rid of Trump, and when he goes, his enablers will be held to account as well.

[Ra'fat Al-Dajani is a Palestinian-American businessman and political commentator.]