

A Complete Settlement Freeze

[President Obama] "wants to see a stop to settlements -- not some settlements, not outposts, not 'natural growth' exceptions..." -- Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, May 27, 2009

A settlement freeze is critical to progress in the peace process.

It is clear that many settlements will need to be evacuated to make way for an eventual Palestinian State. A settlement freeze sends a strong signal to the Palestinians and to the Arab world that Israel is committed to a two-state solution to the conflict and encourages Arab leaders to be more forthcoming with regard to President Obama's request for confidence-building measures toward Israel.

A settlement freeze is in America's best interest.

Every administration since President Johnson has called on Israel to halt settlement construction, an impediment to peace and stability in the region. Israel's settlement policy has been a source of tension between American and Israeli leaders, and has led to much anger on the Arab street. Given the Obama administration's efforts to mend ties with the Arab world – in part, to help Israel achieve a secure peace – the administration needs Israel's leadership to cooperate on this important issue by fulfilling its previous obligations to stop settlement activity.

A settlement freeze is in Israel's best interest.

The settlement enterprise has been militarily, politically, and economically costly to Israel. Settlements have been a huge military burden on Israel, which has employed an estimated 100,000 armed personnel to defend the settlers – diverting the army's efforts to fighting terrorism and ensuring the security of Israel. Politically, the settlements have harmed Israel's international standing, alienated its neighbors, divided the Israeli public, and threaten to undermine Israel's future as a Jewish and democratic state. Economically, settlements have diverted important resources that could have gone to pressing

socio-economic needs in Israel proper. The government spends about ten times more money on settlers than on the other 97% of Israeli citizens. Settlers enjoy inexpensive housing, heavily subsidized social services, and generous building permits – in contrast to everyone else in Israel, Arab or Jew. The settlement movement has cost Israel between \$50 billion to \$100 billion since 1967.

A settlement freeze is consistent with Israel's legal obligations.

Israel committed itself to a freeze on settlement expansion when it ratified the Road Map to Peace in 2003 and then again in the 2007 Annapolis Agreement, when the parties committed "to immediately implement their respective obligations under the ... road map."

The "Natural growth" argument is a poor justification for the expansion of settlements.

The Israeli government claims that it must expand existing settlements to accommodate "natural growth," i.e., the housing needs of growing Jewish families. Yet, according to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, over a third of the "natural" growth has come from immigrants, and nearly half of all planned expansion serves to accommodate new settlement. Further, nowhere inside the Green Line does the government fund housing to accommodate growing families. Moreover, Arab residents of Israel – particularly those in East Jerusalem – have been denied the right to expand their homes due to natural growth; often, their expanded homes have been demolished by government order. Therefore, as Labor Party's MK Ophir Pines said, "All of the talk about 'natural growth' in the settlements is a bluff, and the Americans know that."

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