



Settlements

Israel's settlements in the occupied territories have, for over forty years, been an obstacle to peace. They have drained Israel's economy, military, and democracy and eroded the country's ability to uphold the rule of law.

Continued settlement growth undermines the prospects for peace by making Palestinians doubt Israeli motives and commitment, and by complicating the territorial compromises that will be necessary in final status talks. The arrangements that have been made for the benefit of settlers and for security – checkpoints, settler-only roads, the route of the security barrier* – have all made daily life more difficult for Palestinians, deepening hostility and increasing the odds of violence and conflict. A majority of Israelis have recognized this reality and oppose settlement expansion, yet their views have been outweighed by a small, vocal pro-settlement minority.

J Street supports President Obama's continuation of nine previous U.S. administrations' policy against settlement construction, including in East Jerusalem.

J Street also shares the Obama administration's hope that the current 10-month period of restrictions on settlement construction announced by the Israeli government will allow a focus in the coming months on establishing a two-state solution and advancing toward comprehensive Israeli-Arab peace. Special Envoy Mitchell is correct to note that in halting some settlement construction for a limited time, this Israeli government has taken a step forward. However, this is not the full settlement freeze that has been the consistent policy of the United States, and does not address the deteriorating situation in East Jerusalem.

Ultimately, the question of settlement expansion should become moot – because the real issue that needs to be addressed and settled quickly is the route of the border between Israel and Palestine. Certain agreed modifications to the 1967 lines are possible - allowing some settlements to be incorporated within Israel's final and agreed borders in the context of reciprocal land swaps. Those settlements (perhaps accounting for as many as two-thirds of all settlers) will then become part of Israeli recognized sovereign territory and construction there will be able to continue according to the laws and zoning ordinances of those localities.

[*It is important to note that J Street supports the concept of a security barrier as an important element of Israel's defense, but believes that the barrier must be located along an internationally recognized border. Its present route has confiscated land and separated Palestinians from their jobs, health care and family. It will have to be relocated in many sections as part of a final status agreement.]

J Street is the political home for pro-Israel, pro-peace Americans.

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