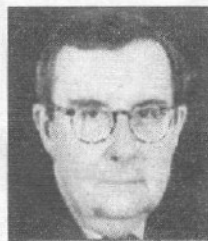


Israel's settlement

Palestine



By William Pfaff

Obama had declared in his Cairo speech that the construction of new settlements must stop, Netanyahu — had replied 'No'

THE Obama administration's confrontation with Israel over its colonies inside the Palestine territories began as a test of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's willingness to enter serious negotiations on a Middle Eastern settlement. It actually possesses potential dimensions that few today imagine.

Netanyahu first counted on the Likud and settlement lobbies in Washington to produce, as always in the past, a disingenuous formula that would allow the colonies to continue to expropriate Palestinian land and expand the settlements, while the American government oversaw essentially meaningless negotiations with the Palestinians.

The prime minister was in Europe this week, and told RAI, Italian state radio, that after President Barack Obama had declared in his Cairo speech that the construction of new settlements must stop, he — Netanyahu — had replied "No" but had accepted Obama's call for a two-state solution with the Palestinians, provided that it took place under specified conditions. Previously Netanyahu had rejected the two-state approach.

The conditions would deny a prospective Palestine state of full sov-

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eighty, control of its frontiers or of its security, economy and trade, airspace, and water and other natural resources. The conditions are obviously unacceptable, as they are meant to be.

Netanyahu's proposal constituted a message to the Palestinians that they should expect nothing from his govern-

ment, and to Obama that Israel expects the United States to ask nothing further from it, and to resume the meaningless negotiations that have gone on since the first President Bush tried and failed to confront Israel on extension of the settlements.

The Israeli prime minister went on to say, "I think the more we spend time arguing about (the settlements) the more we waste time instead of moving towards peace." On Wednesday, he paid an official visit to France, expecting congratulations on his agreement to the creation of a Palestinian state. Instead, President Nicolas Sarkozy told him that France "would no longer accept Israeli subterfuges meant to disguise colony construction by the pretext of 'natural growth' in the settlements."

This position already had been characterised by Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman as making it "impossible (for Israel) to build synagogues or kindergartens, or to add rooms for a family." Lieberman, who immigrated to Israel from Moldova, wishes that Israel's Arab citizens — survivors of the original Arab population of what is now Israel — be given special identity documents and be encouraged to quit Israel. One might think that if they did depart they would leave real estate vacancies that could accommodate expanding Jewish settler families.

Netanyahu was scheduled to meet on Thursday in Paris with former US Senator George Mitchell, President Obama's special envoy on Middle Eastern affairs, but the meeting was cancelled by the American side (reported the Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth), and Mitchell returned to Washington. The White House unoffi-

it stalemate

cially made it known that there would be no further meetings with Netanyahu until there was a real settlement freeze.

Now this is all very well, in principle a long-overdue restoration of justice and realism to American policy on Israel and Palestine, but what follows? Would the American position on a settlement freeze be enforced with financial or political sanctions if the Netanyahu government refused to yield?

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perception of national destiny and national security. The number of Israeli settlers in the West Bank and the Palestinian sector of Jerusalem now approaches a half-million. The settlements with their connecting roads, security installations and outposts dominate some 40 percent of the West Bank territories.

Geoffrey Aronson of the Foundation for Middle East Peace in Washington, sympathetic to the Palestinians, writes in the foundation's most recent newsletter that merely a freeze in settlement construction would require Israel to "undo the system by which the military establishment, the legislative and executive arms of the state, settlers, and public, private, and supranational communal organisations collaborate in the encouragement and expansion of settlements."

Major elements in the state administration, defence forces, planning and budget agencies, and security programmes and practices, plus the incentives to individuals and business to develop the settlements, would have to be undone. Aronson concludes that even a real freeze would require "an undertaking so complex and requiring an Israeli political decision so profound that no Israeli government would undertake (it) except as a result of a broader decision to terminate (the entire occupation of the Palestinian territories)."

That is wholly impossible without a huge, internationally guaranteed reconstruction of the security relationships of Palestinians, Israelis and the surrounding Arab states, which is all but unimaginable. But then what is imaginable? Going on as things are? Clarification of Obama administration policy is essential. COURTESY TRUTHDIG

Netanyahu was elected in order to defy the US on the colonies and on Palestinian statehood. Since few sensible people in Israel wish to alienate Washington, the Netanyahu government might be brought down by US sanctions

Palestinian statehood. Since few sensible people in Israel wish to alienate Washington, the Netanyahu government, again in principle, might be brought down by American sanctions.

What then? The settlement movement, which has gone on now for some four decades, has become integral to the Israeli