

# The Bush Administration & the Israeli-Palestinian Stalemate

By Stephen Zunes

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Whether or not the shaky cease-fire in effect since the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States holds, the prospects for Israeli-Palestinian peace remain dim.

Current Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon rejects the previous Israeli government's premise that it is important to make territorial sacrifices to end the conflict with the Palestinians. Sharon has made clear that any Palestinian state would have to be limited to just 42% of the West Bank and 80% of the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, the Bush administration has dismissed Clinton's proposals, which would have returned around 94% of the occupied territories to the Palestinians. According to the Bush administration, the two parties should work out their land and security problems themselves.

This may not be possible, however. For most of the year, the Palestinians have called for a resumption of negotiations, but the Israeli government has refused. The Israelis insist—with American support—that there be a total end of Palestinian violence for an extended period before they resume talks. This gives extremist groups, which are beyond the control of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and which oppose the peace process altogether, an incentive to launch terrorist attacks and other acts of violence to make sure that the talks will not resume. Similarly, it buys time for the Israelis to further expand their illegal settlements in the occupied territories. Even if the negotiations were to reconvene, the Israeli government has made it clear that it would take an even more uncompromising position than the previous government of Ehud Barak. Despite all this, the administration, Congress, and most of the U.S. media are placing the bulk of the blame on the breakdown of the peace process on the Palestinians.

The Bush administration has made a number of contradictory statements regarding Israeli policies. Secretary of State Colin Powell has on several occa-

sions made criticisms of Israeli actions, only to have them soft-pedaled by the White House. Meanwhile, both Republican and Democratic congressional leaders have openly defended recent Israeli policies. The overall Bush administration position seems to be to leave the two parties to work it out among themselves, ignoring the gross power asymmetry between the Palestinians and their Israeli occupiers. Bilateral negotiations between a government representing the strongest economic and military power in the region, with the weakened and corrupt leadership of an occupied people can hardly be considered fair, yet the Bush administration acts as if the two sides are coming together as equals with “both sides needing to compromise.” Such inaction favors the status quo, namely continued Israeli occupation, repression, colonization, and the deepening patterns of violence. Furthermore, the U.S. has continued the policy of previous administration of undercutting the legitimacy of any party—such as the United Nations or the European Union—which might take a more even-handed approach that might challenge the legitimacy of the Israeli occupation.

Despite Sharon's opposition to the U.S.-brokered peace treaty with Egypt in 1978, his abstaining from the U.S.-brokered peace treaty with Jordan in 1994, his opposition to the 1993 Oslo accords and the 1997 agreement on Hebron, as well as his objections to Israel's partial withdrawal from Lebanon in 1985 and total withdrawal in 2000, the Bush administration and congressional leaders insist he is interested in pursuing a peace agreement. Although President Bush has welcomed the rightist prime minister to Washington, he has refused to meet with President Arafat—yet another indication of U.S. support for Sharon's nego-

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tiating position. Indeed, Sharon won the office of prime minister largely due to his deliberately provocative visit to the Haram al-Sharif (also known as the Temple Mount) in September 2000. The strong U.S. support for his government is essentially rewarding him for this provocative action, which sparked the

current cycle of violence. With pressure on Capitol Hill from both members of his own party as well as the Democrats to take positions even further to the right, there is little pressure for the Bush administration to take the necessary steps to support Israeli-Palestinian peace.



## ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS

There is little question that the chief obstacle to Israeli-Palestinian peace is the Israeli settlements, reserved for Jews only, established by Israel in the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and the rest of the West Bank. It is illegal under the Fourth Geneva Convention for any country to transfer its civilian population onto lands seized by military force. Under UN Security Council resolutions 446 and 465, Israel is required to withdraw from these settlements. The U.S. initially supported these resolutions when they were passed in the late 1970s, but has since blocked the United Nations from enforcing them.

Former Israeli defense minister Moshe Dayan acknowledged that the settlements did not help Israel's security situation, but they were needed since, without them, Israel could not justify having the army in the occupied territories. Ariel Sharon, who served as housing minister and other cabinet posts in previous right-wing governments, played a major role in the expansion of these illegal settlements. He bragged back in 1995 about how these settlements were "the only factor" that had prevented then Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin from agreeing to withdraw from the occupied territories and was proud of the fact that this had "created difficulties" in the negotiations with the Palestinians.

With Clinton insisting that the settlement blocs be incorporated into Israel at Camp David in the summer of 2000, the U.S. was essentially vindicating the Israeli right's plan to create a demographic transformation which—however

illegal—could then become the basis for later territorial claims. This U.S. policy, unchanged under the Bush administration, can only lead Sharon, now the prime minister, to assume that future settlements will likewise become the basis for further U.S.-approved annexations of Palestinian land.

The U.S. acknowledged the illegality of the settlements through the Carter administration. By the senior Bush administration, they were labeled only as an "obstacle to peace." Under Clinton, they were simply considered "unhelpful."

President Jimmy Carter thought he had promises of a five-year freeze from Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin through the Camp David Agreement with Egypt. When the prime minister resumed construction after only three months, Carter refused to act, even though the U.S. was a guarantor of the peace treaty. The senior President Bush insisted on a settlement freeze as a condition to granting a controversial \$10 billion loan guarantee to Israel, but pressure from Democrats in Congress and 1992 Democratic presidential nominee Bill Clinton led him to capitulate and approve the loan guarantee with Israel agreeing only to limit construction to the "natural growth" of existing settlements. The number of settlers in the West Bank has more than doubled in the ensuing nine years.

When the Oslo Accords were signed the following year, the Palestinians pressed to address the settlement issue immediately, but the U.S. insisted that such discussions be delayed. Indeed,

putting off such a fundamental issue as the settlements as a “final status issue” gave the Israelis a full eight years to create facts on the ground through a dramatic growth in settlements, which the Clinton administration knew would make a final peace agreement all the more difficult. At no point did Clinton insist that Israel stop the expansion of Jewish settlements and confiscation of land destined to be part of a Palestinian state. It is only because of these settlements that the boundaries for a future Palestinian state envisioned by Clinton and Barak took its unviable geographic dimensions. Had the U.S. used its considerable leverage to halt their expansion early in the process, this problem could have been avoided. Indeed, even Robert Malley, Clinton’s Middle East specialist in the National Security Council, acknowledged that the U.S. had not been tough enough on Israel for its settlement drive and the failure to do so was a major factor in the collapse of the peace process.

Between sixty and one hundred settlements lie outside areas that most observers consider could realistically be annexed to Israel. Most of these settlements were created by Sharon during his previous cabinet positions—quite explicitly to prevent the creation a territorially viable Palestinian entity. Between September 1995, in the Oslo II accord, and March 2000, successive Israeli governments were envisioning maintaining all but the most isolated of these settlements and dividing the new Palestinian state into a series of non-contiguous cantons. What the Israelis presented in peace talks in Taba, Egypt in January largely

abandoned this strategy, reducing them to a small number of settlement blocs. Under Sharon, however, they have reverted to the old strategy without apparent U.S. objections.

With the Oslo accords referring to the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a “single territorial unit, the integrity and status of which will be preserved during the interim period” and a prohibition against either side taking steps that could prejudice the permanent status negotiations, the Palestinians assumed back in 1993 when they signed the agreement that this would prevent the Israelis from building more settlements. Furthermore, as the principal guarantor of the Oslo Agreement, the U.S. was obliged to force the Israelis to cease construction if they tried to do so. However, Israel and America have refused to live up to their obligations and—since the signing of the Oslo Accords—the number of settlers as grown by nearly 150,000, moving onto land that should be returned to the three million Palestinians who already live there. Since the Oslo Accords were signed, Israeli settlers on the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) have more than doubled to 200,000, some within thirty new settlements and the rest in expansions of existing settlements. Settlers in greater East Jerusalem have increased by at least one-third. It is very difficult to appreciate the sincerity of Israel and the U.S. in reaching a negotiated peace as Israel’s settlement drive has continued unabated. Palestinians watched as their land was confiscated and Jewish-only highways were constructed while under the cover of a U.S.-sponsored “peace process.” Ironically,

much of the U.S. money in support of the supposed “implementation” of the 1997 Wye River Agreement has been earmarked to build these so-called bypass roads, placing the U.S. in violation of article 7 of UN Security Council resolution 465, which prohibits member states from assisting Israel in its colonization drive.

Much of Israel’s violence against Palestinians has been justified as protecting settlers—who have no legal right to be in the occupied territories. The Mitchell Commission Report called on the Israelis to consider evacuating the more isolated settlements, which have been flashpoints for conflict, but the U.S. has failed to endorse the idea.

The Mitchell Commission Report also explicitly calls for a total settlement freeze, including roads and so-called “natural growth.” Sharon’s offer of a “settlement freeze” in June excluded new roads and so-called “natural growth” of existing settlements, which can be liberally interpreted. While the current Bush administration has termed Israeli settlement expansion “provocative,” it has not repudiated the Clinton administration’s support for “natural growth” of the settlements. Given the history of “natural growth” allowing for unabated expansion of these illegal settlements, the Bush administration position is essentially an endorsement of Sharon’s colonization drive.

Even with the recent swing of Israeli public opinion to the right, a great majority of Israelis support a total freeze on the settlements in return for a cease-fire. However, Sharon has refused and the U.S. appears to be backing him.



## THE ONGOING VIOLENCE AND REPRESSION

**T**he extraordinary violence that has erupted in the Israeli-occupied territories was a direct consequence of the frustration felt by Palestinians who had seen seven years of

peace negotiations result in ever increasing poverty, loss of land, humiliation and harassment at Israeli checkpoints, and still no state of their own. International law recognizes the right of people under foreign military occupation to armed

resistance against the occupying forces. Yet the U.S. government has repeatedly condemned the Palestinians for their use of violence—while refusing to call for an end of the Israeli occupation. The Bush administration has spoken only of stop-

ping “the cycle of violence,” as if the violence of occupation and the violence of resistance to that occupation were on the same moral level. Ironically, leading Democrats, such as Gary Ackerman, the ranking Democrat on the House Subcommittee on the Middle East, have criticized the administration from the right, claiming that “It is not a cycle of violence. It is Palestinian violence and Israeli response.”

Human Rights Watch has been among a number of human rights groups who have issued reports on the violence and repression. While it has noted how the Palestinian Authority had “failed to prevent Palestinian gunmen from firing on settlements from civilian areas, and does not appear to have investigated or prosecuted cases where Israeli civilians have been killed or seriously injured,” it emphasized that “Israeli security forces have committed by far the most serious and systematic violations.” The report documents “excessive and indiscriminate use of lethal force, arbitrary killings, and collective punishment, including willful destruction of property and severe restrictions on movement that far exceed any possible military necessity.” The report also criticized the Israeli government for failing to protect unarmed Palestinians for attacks by right-wing settlers.

Meanwhile, on Capitol Hill, the majority of the Human Rights Caucus in the House of Representatives has supported a series of resolutions supporting the Israeli government and blaming the Palestinians exclusively for the violence. Indeed, the chairman of the caucus, Democrat Tom Lantos of California, has been one of the most outspoken defenders of the rightist government of Ariel Sharon.

More than 40% of those killed by the Israelis have been children. However, leading members of Congress have blamed the Palestinians for the deaths of their own children by allowing them to participate in the demonstrations. Indeed, a bipartisan resolution sponsored by Democratic Congressman Eliot Engle

blames the Palestinian Authority for the deaths of children at the hands of Israeli occupation forces.

Human Rights Watch joined UN Human Rights Commission’s Mary Robinson, Amnesty International, and other human rights groups in calling for the UN Security Council to “immediately establish a permanent international presence in the West Bank and Gaza to monitor and report regularly on the compliance by all parties with international human rights and humanitarian law standards.” However, the same week the report was released, the U.S. cast the lone dissenting vote in the Security Council authorizing the establishment of just such a force, thereby vetoing the measure. Subsequently, the Bush administration supported a vague reference by Western leaders in the G-8 summit in Genoa for some kind of international monitoring presence, but emphasized—as did the Clinton administration—that it could only be established with the consent of Israel. However, since this force would be within Palestinian areas outside of Israel’s jurisdiction, no such consent would be required. As a result, any hope for such monitors has been blocked by the Bush administration. Ironically, leading Democrats in Congress have criticized the Bush administration for even giving lip service to the concept of international monitors.

Dozens of small, isolated Palestinian enclaves are blocked off and strangled by Israeli occupation forces, where the civilian population has experienced severe food shortages, lack of medical care and unemployment over 50%. The Israelis have erected 91 new military posts surrounding Palestinian population centers in series of multiple sieges.

There have been a series of terrorist attacks by underground Palestinian Islamic groups inside Israel, which have killed dozens of civilians. Ironically, following several acts of terrorism by radical Islamic groups, Israel has attacked political offices, police headquarters, and other buildings belonging to the Palestinian Authority, which has repeatedly con-

demned such attacks. There have been some attacks against Israeli settlers by Tanzim militia, which grew out of the Fatah movement. Even though Arafat is the founder and leader of Fatah, he does not control the entire organization. Indeed, the uprising has pushed younger, more militant leaders to the forefront. In addition, much of the Palestinian violence has come from Palestinians under direct Israeli control, not from areas administered by the Palestinian Authority. Yet there has been widespread support on Capitol Hill and, to a lesser extent, from the Bush administration for Israeli attacks against Palestine. The Israeli position, backed by the U.S., is that if force does not work, just use more force.

There is an abject failure by U.S. officials and much of the media to recognize that Israeli forces firing missiles into inhabited homes, shelling civilian towns, increasing the randomness of the death squads in the occupied territories, and using live ammunition against protesting children are also acts of terror.

The Palestinians have endured 34 years of occupation, the longest foreign military rule—save for Japan’s occupation of Korea. Historically, people under military occupation do not tend to act rationally. The U.S. failed to recognize that Palestinian violence and terrorism is a direct consequence of the occupation and the U.S. refusal to uphold international legal standards.

The Palestinians are gravely mistaken to believe that violence will lead Israel to end the occupation or the U.S. to end its support of the occupation. It has simply hardened Israeli and American attitudes. Not only is such violence—particularly when directed toward civilians—morally wrong, but it is politically counterproductive as well.

What has led so many Palestinians to delude themselves to think otherwise, however, is the example of the success of the radical Islamic Hizbullah militia in forcing Israel out of its 22-year occupation of southern Lebanon. Indeed, there are few Palestinians engaged in the vio-

lence who do not cite Lebanon as a model. The U.S. bears great responsibility for this shift in perception. The U.S. refused to enforce UN Security Council resolution 425 and nine subsequent resolutions demanding Israel's immediate and unconditional withdrawal from southern Lebanon. Indeed, even when a solid majority of Israelis polled expressed their desire for Israel to withdraw, the U.S. ambassador to Israel, Martin Indyk, publicly registered his opposition to any such withdrawal. By blocking enforcement of the UN Security Council resolutions and refusing to push for a negotiated withdrawal, Israel pulled out only when their casualties mounted in what Hizbullah could claim was a military victory. As a result, Palestinians see a lesson: it is naive to believe that negotiating with Israel, relying on UN Security Council resolutions, or believing that the U.S. can be trusted as a mediator will get them their freedom. Like the Lebanese, many are coming to see that the only solution is through armed struggle under the leadership of a radical Islamic movement. As a result of its policy in Lebanon, therefore, the U.S. is largely to blame for this radicalizing shift in Palestinian attitudes.

The Israeli government has dispatched assassination squads, ranging from individuals with rifles to U.S.-supplied helicopter gun ships with missiles, to murder

Palestinian activists. Some of these have been wanted terrorists associated with radical Islamic groups. Others have been civilian political leaders of Islamic organizations and activists in Arafat's Fatah party. One target was a teacher at a Catholic school who had been working closely with Israeli teachers on developing a conflict resolution curriculum. There have also been a number of innocent bystanders murdered, including children. Indeed, Princeton international law professor Richard Falk, an American Jew who served on the UN fact-finding commission, expressed criticism at their "seemingly random hit list." The commission noted that such assassinations "are grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 147, and of international humanitarian law." To its credit, some Bush administration officials have criticized the assassination squads, though Vice-President Dick Cheney, in an interview this summer, appeared to be supportive of the practice, though he later backtracked. However, Senator Joseph Biden, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Democrats' chief foreign policy spokesman, has unambiguously defended the Israeli use of these extrajudicial assassinations.

The very idea that the Palestinians should unilaterally halt their uprising in order to return to a negotiation process

where the occupying power has declared up front that it will offer even less palatable terms than the negotiation position of its predecessor is ludicrous. Indeed, most Palestinians strongly oppose ending the uprising without anything concrete in return from the Israelis, such as a settlement freeze. Further crackdowns would play into the hands of Palestinian militants who claim the PA is essentially serving as a proxy force for the Israeli occupation. It is totally unrealistic to call for an end to Palestinian violence without also calling for an end to Israel's military occupation and colonization drive, yet this is precisely the policy of the Bush administration and Congress.

There is much that could be said condemning terrorist action by Palestinian groups against innocent civilians inside Israel and other acts of Palestinian violence. Yet the Israeli violence toward the Palestinians has both been far greater in scope; also—unlike the Palestinian violence—leading U.S. political figures have actively defended it and America supplies much of weaponry used in carrying out these acts of violence. Although the U.S. has little direct control over Palestinian violence, the U.S. could stop the Israeli violence by turning off the spigot of military and economic aid to the Israeli government. It has chosen not to do so.



## THE MITCHELL COMMISSION REPORT

As a means of short-circuiting a United Nations commission to investigate the causes and possible solutions to the ongoing conflict, President Bill Clinton last fall appointed a U.S.-led team to put forward its own report. It was to be led by former Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, who could hardly be expected to provide an unbiased perspective. As a senator, Mitchell had attacked the senior Bush administration from the right on policy toward Israel and Palestine, particularly

when then-Secretary of State James Baker accurately declared that Israeli settlements ringing eastern Jerusalem were in the occupied territories. In effect, Mitchell argued the U.S. should recognize Israel's unilateral annexation of a huge swath of the West Bank, which would have challenged international law, UN Security Council resolutions, and the policies of every U.S. administration since Israel seized the territory in 1967. Mitchell received large campaign contributions from right-wing Political Action

Committees supportive of the Shamir government, then in office in Israel, and was a strong supporter of unconditional military and economic aid to Shamir's government.

Other members of the commission included former Senator Warren Rudman, also a strong supporter of Israel's earlier right-wing governments, as well former Turkish president Suleyman Demirel, a strong ally of Israel. They outnumbered the more moderate members,

Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorbjorn Jagland and European Union representative Javier Solana. The U.S. determined that the commission would operate out of Washington, would not have a local office, and would not carry out any investigations on the ground. Israeli journalist Meron Benvenisti, a critic of the Sharon government, wrote that “The committee will become one more instrument for stifling any initiative for examining the actions of Israeli security forces and for uncovering the truth lurking behind the propaganda smokescreen.”

The commission’s report, released at the end of April, refused to hold either side solely responsible for the breakdown of the peace process or the ongoing violence. The report recognized that the Palestinian Authority needed to do more to curb violence from the Palestinian side and called on Israel to end its widespread use of lethal force against unarmed demonstrators. Yet its failure to call for an international protection force underscored the commission’s unwillingness to support the decisive steps necessary to actually curb further bloodshed.

The report correctly recognized that the violence was not solely a result of

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s provocative visit to the Islamic holy site of Haram al-Sharif in occupied East Jerusalem last fall and that it was not part of a preconceived plan by the Palestinians to launch a violent struggle. It recognized that the root of the uprising was in Palestinian frustrations in the peace process to get their land back, fueled by unnecessarily violent responses by both sides in the early hours and days of the fighting. However, the report refused to call for Israel’s withdrawal from the occupied territories in return for security guarantees, which Israel is required to do under UN Security Council resolution 242 and 338.

While the Mitchell Commission Report failed to call for Israel to withdraw from its illegal settlements as required under international law and UN Security Council resolutions 446 and 465, it did emphasize there was no hope to an end of Palestinian violence unless there was a freeze on settlements. However, the U.S.—spearheaded by CIA director George Tenet—followed up the Mitchell Commission Report by pushing for a cease-fire agreement from the Palestinians—even as the Sharon government pledged to continue building more

settlements. The Bush administration and Congress essentially put forward the Mitchell Commission Report only in terms of getting a cease-fire, conveniently dropping the report’s insistence on a settlement freeze and other Israeli responsibilities. In effect, it put the pressure on the Palestinians to cease their resistance to Israeli occupation forces without anything in return from Israel. The U.S.-brokered cease-fire, which technically went into effect in June but never fully materialized, left the situation on the ground with no changes that would provide the Palestinians with any incentive to end the uprisings. Not only was there not a halt in building settlements, there were no international monitors or verifiers and no buffer zones separating the two sides. The U.S. essentially let Israel be the monitor and verifier, as well as the decisionmaker regarding its implementation and subsequent steps. Within days of the agreement, Israel launched its assassination squads into Palestinian Authority areas, but claimed these were not cease fire violations but self-defense against what it called terrorists. Nor did the Israelis end their siege of Palestinian towns and cities or the closures.



## PALESTINIAN RIGHTS AND ISRAELI SECURITY

**T**he big Palestinian compromises—ending the armed struggle and recognizing Israel—were made up front in the 1993 Oslo Accords, with the naive assumption that the U.S. would pressure Israel to make needed compromises later. The Palestinians have few bargaining chips in their favor other than their violence—though this more likely will set back their cause rather than advance it.

Since the Palestinian demands are well-grounded in international law and human rights covenants, calls for greater compromises by the Palestinians means endorsing the denial of these basic rights.

While the U.S. has been largely successful in forcing the Palestinians to scale down their long-held aspirations, the Palestinians have been unwilling to give up on their fundamental rights.

That Barak offered more than any previous prime minister is less a reflection of his generosity, or—in Clinton’s words—being “courageous,” than it is a reflection of the intransigence of the previous U.S.-backed Israeli governments. To the U.S., giving back some of what you have stolen is a sign of courage, and failure of the Palestinians to accept less than what is owed to them is a sign of failure to compromise.

It is noteworthy that for nearly twenty years the U.S. barred the PLO from participating in the U.S.-sponsored peace process on the grounds that UN Security Council resolution 242 had to be the basis of negotiation. The resolution did not recognize Palestinian national rights, but it did call on Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories in return for security guarantees, allowing for only very minor territorial adjustments to straighten some of the lines from the 1949 armistice which formed the borders of Israel, and insisting that such adjustments had to be mutual. Once the Palestinians formally accepted the resolu-

tion in 1988 and were allowed into the peace process five years later, the U.S. essentially dropped it while the Clinton administration was in office. The current Bush administration appears to be returning to the policy from the Nixon through the senior Bush administration of giving lip service to 242 while granting Israel the diplomatic, financial, and military means to ignore it. Israel has never defined where its borders are, which exacerbate Arab fears that it is an expansionist power. Indeed, as Sharon told Secretary of State Colin Powell during his visit in February, “we learn a lot from you Americans. We saw how you moved West using this method.”

A cornerstone of the U.S.-led peace process has been to keep the United Nations out. Indeed, a 1991 Memorandum of Understanding between the United States and Israel explicitly stated that the UN would not have a role. Then-U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Richard Holbrooke claimed that a UN Security Council resolution last October criticizing the excessive use of force by Israeli occupation forces put the UN “out of the running” in terms of any contributions to the peace process. The even more strongly worded congressional resolutions against the Palestinians passed that same month, apparently, did not similarly disqualify the United States from its leadership role, however.

According to UN Security Council resolution 242, the only caveat for Israel’s complete withdrawal for the territories occupied in the 1967 war was security guarantees from Israel’s Arab neighbors. Unfortunately, this has been compromised in recent years by Washington and Israel dramatically expanding what was once the popular understanding of security guarantees and non-aggression from neighboring states to somehow guaranteeing the physical safety of every Israeli from suicide bombers—part of underground terrorist groups beyond the control of any government, particularly a disempowered Palestinian Authority under siege by Israeli occupation forces.

Temporarily seizing territory of hostile neighbors to create a buffer zone pending the establishment of security guarantees made some strategic sense thirty years ago when troops of Arab states were massing on Israel’s borders threatening the country’s very existence and guerrilla groups were engaged in cross-border raids against civilian targets. Today, however, there are no armies massing on Israel’s border. Israel is at peace with Egypt and Jordan and peace with Lebanon and Syria would be forthcoming once Israel withdrew from the occupied Syrian territory in the Golan. The Palestinians have offered guarantees that their future mini-state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip would be largely demilitarized and no foreign forces hostile to Israel would be allowed. Like Egypt and Syria, they have offered international monitors, and have even gone a step forward by allowing Israel to station some of its own monitors in Palestinian territory.

There are no more attacks by the Palestinian Authority or former PLO factions within Israel; attacks from Fatah and other groups have been limited to Israeli occupation forces and Israeli colonists inside the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The terrorist attacks inside Israel have involved radical Islamic groups outside of the control of the Palestinian Authority and have generally involved individual suicide bombers, who do not require a territory from which to operate. Indeed, many if not most of the terrorist attacks within Israel since the Oslo Accords have come from operatives already within areas of Israeli control.

In short, there is no longer any strategic rationale for Israel to hold onto to an inch of land beyond its internationally recognized border. The Democrats and Republicans in Congress who try to portray Israel’s territorial land grab as necessary for the country’s security interests are simply rationalizing the colonization by one county of another through military force and repression. Indeed, the fact that the vast majority of Israelis killed since the uprising began last year have been in the occupied territories is indica-

tive of how holding onto the West Bank and Gaza Strip threatens the security of Israelis; it does not enhance it.

The archipelago of illegal settlements amidst occupied Palestinian territory essentially constitutes a 2,000-mile border, ten times longer than Israel’s 1967 borders. Israeli armed forces have deployed more divisions protecting these 200,000 colonists outside of Israel than its six million citizens within Israel. A majority of Israelis has expressed support for removing settlers, by force if necessary. Dozens of Israeli conscripts have been killed defending Israeli settlements in isolated areas far removed from the U.S.-Israeli supported settlement blocs, creating enormous resentment within the Israeli population. The Mitchell Commission Report encouraged Israel to withdraw from these isolated settlements. However, despite claims of concern about Israeli casualties, the U.S. has refused to support the evacuation of these isolated colonists.

Israel would be far more secure with a clearly delineated, internationally recognized border than the current patchwork of settlements and military outposts on confiscated land amidst a hostile population. Despite claims of being concerned about Israel’s security, Clinton’s peace proposal presented in December would have left Israel with narrow, indefensible peninsulas of territory within the West Bank. With an Israeli withdrawal, the terrorist attacks inside Israel would be reduced, since it is the occupation and the Palestinian Authority’s inability to negotiate an independent state that are the prime motivations of the radical Islamists who commit acts of terrorism.

This is why it is incorrect to accuse U.S. policy as being “too pro-Israel:” U.S. support of Ariel Sharon’s rightist policies actually endanger Israel’s legitimate security needs.

The Bush administration and both the Republicans and Democrats in Congress have made clear that they will not link U.S. military and economic aid to Ariel Sharon’s government and its occupation forces with Israeli adherence to interna-

tional law, UN Security Council resolutions, international human rights standards, or a willingness to make the necessary compromises for peace. As a result, the Sharon government has little outside incentive to make peace.

This is significant, since while there are some Israelis who—for religious or nationalist reasons—oppose the necessary compromises for peace and there are other Israelis who—for moral or pragmatic reasons—support the necessary compromises for peace, the majority of Israelis are in the middle. Historically, Israeli voters have tended to lean toward the peace camp if they feared Israel's close relationship with America and the resulting largesse of aid were threatened and lean toward the right if they felt Israel could get away with it. The *carte*

*blanche* from the U.S. for whatever the Israeli government may do significantly hurts the peace forces within Israel.

With the U.S. arming and financing Israel's occupation and colonization drive, and blaming the Palestinians exclusively for the violence, Sharon can essentially do as he pleases.

This buying time is disastrous for Israel, since the ongoing occupation and the dimming hopes that the Palestinians will have a viable state of their own is just what breeds extremists prone to commit acts of terrorism. It further isolates Israel from other Middle Eastern countries and much of the rest of the world and creates a greater dependency on America. The U.S. is clearly willing to help Israel buy time, but it will not be the Americans

who will pay the price, but the Palestinians and, ultimately, the Israelis as well.

Both Israeli and U.S. policy seems to be driven by the assumption that it is a zero-sum game, that every gain for the Palestinians necessarily comes at Israeli expense. Israel's core security concern at this point in its history, however, is the violent reaction of a population resentful over a 34-year occupation. The reality, then, is that Israeli security and Palestinian rights are not mutually exclusive but mutually dependent on the other. The Palestinians will not get their rights until Israel feels secure and Israel will not be secure until Palestinians have their rights. Until Washington recognizes this fundamental reality, the U.S. can not be an effective peacemaker.



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## Who's Who in the Bush Administration

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- Karen Hansen-Kuhn *Bush's Trade Policy: The NAFTA Express*
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- Neil Hicks *The Bush Administration and Human Rights*
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- Richard Lee Armitage
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- Condoleezza Rice
- Donald Rumsfeld
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