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Israel: The Killers of Peace

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The Israeli Jewish settlers of the Palestinian territory, which was occupied by Israel in 1967, are dictating unilaterally the demarcation of the borders with any future Palestinian state, thus rendering its creation impossible; holding the Israeli decision-making process hostage, they have become the real killers of peace, who brought the twenty –year old Palestinian – Israeli peace process to its current stalemate.

As early as the summer of 1995, the Iraqi born Israeli – British "new historian" Avi Shlaim wrote in the Journal of Palestine Studies: "The settlers now are the ones who determine Israel 's internal political agenda."

Their numbers then were in the tens of thousands; now there are three quarters of a million settlers. The Head of the "Samaria Regional Council" of the Israeli illegal settlements in the Israeli – occupied Palestinian West Bank (WB) of River Jordan, Gershon Mesika, on this August 6 boasted there will be one million settlers there "in just three years time," telling "Arutz Sheva" online that "the settlement enterprise in Judea and Samaria (i.e. the Palestinian WB) has passed the point of no return."

Writing in the "National Interest" on September 6, 2012, the President of the U.S./Middle East Project, Henry Siegman, agreed that " Israel 's colonial… settlement project has achieved its intended irreversibility, not only because of its breadth and depth but also because of the political clout of the settlers and their supporters within Israel."

When Benjamin Netanyahu assumed his second term as prime minister, with the settler Avigdor Lieberman as his foreign minister, the German Süddeutsche Zeitung, quoted by Spiegel on March 17, 2009, wrote: "He and Lieberman are the gravediggers of the Middle East peace process. They want to maintain the occupation and expand the settlements."

The electoral campaign of Netanyahu for his first term in 1995 was blamed by Israeli media for creating the right environment which led to the assassination of the "father' of the first Oslo accord for peace with Palestinians in 1993; ever since the "peace process" has been deadlocked.

The incumbent government of Netanyahu's third premiership is now described as the "settlers' government" or "a settler –friendly government," the survival of which is secured by a Knesset led by Speaker Yuli Edelstein, himself an illegal settler of the Neve Daniel colony in the WB, who called recently for the annexation of two thirds of the WB area.

This is a call that was also repeatedly voiced by the pro – settler Jewish Home party, a partner to Netanyahu's ruling coalition, which holds three key ministries, including the housing ministry, and controls the parliamentary finance committee.

Netanyahu declared his backing for the Jewish Home's plan. Minister of Economy Naftali

Bennett was the chairman of the council of the illegal settlements in the WB and Gaza Strip and is still an advocate of imposing Israeli sovereignty unilaterally on "Area C" in the WB. Uzi Landau, of Lieberman's Yisraeli Beiteinu party, has the tourism portfolio. Likud's ardent supporter of settlements, Moshe Yaalon, has the ministry of defense. Foreign minister's deputy, Zeev Elkin, is himself a settler.

The education minister, Shai Piron, of Yair Lapid's so-called "centrist" Yesh Atid party, is a settler rabbi; Lapid himself who is the finance minister supports the "growth" of settlements even during peace talks and rejects any Palestinian sovereignty under any pact in eastern Jerusalem .

Deputy Minister of Defense, Danny Danon of Likud, was quoted by The Jewish Press on August 8 as saying that the "views" of Israel 's chief negotiator, the Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, whose Hatnua party holds six seats only in the settler –dominated Knesset, "do not represent the majority of the current government." Livni's role in Netanyahu's "government of settlers" seems a cosmetic one intended only to circumvent the U.S. pressure for the resumption of the peace talks.

In Israel 's proportional system, the voting settlers and the pro – settler political parties and groups have over the years accumulated enough political clout that is far – in – excess of their numbers to determine the internal balance of power, decide the electoral outcome and dictate their own agenda. They are holding the system hostage. So far they have become the real killers of peace.

On July 28, 2013, Barak Ravid wrote in Haaretz that Netanyahu "is acting so weak … like a prisoner … a hostage" of his pro –settler coalition partners.

During the interval between the first and the second rounds of the recently resumed negotiations, Israel approved a "new" settlement and 1700 settlement units in eastern Jerusalem; the government included 90 settlements in a new list of "national priority development areas" eligible for special benefits; the list included also the three formerly dubbed by the Israeli government as "illegal outposts," namely Bruchin, Rachelim and Sansana.

U.S. Lip Service

On August 11, 2013, the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry reacted by reiterating from Bogota , Colombia his country's "unchanged" position since 1967: The U.S. "views all of the settlements as illegitimate" and had "communicated that policy very clearly to Israel ."

Ironically, "Israel's settlement project" has evolved "irreversible" nonetheless, mocking the U.S. repeatedly declared illegitimacy thereof as merely a lip service that has been all throughout a thinly veiled cover of the U.S. actual protection of the accelerating expansion ever since of "Israel's colonial" project.

No surprise then Kerry from Colombia "expected" what Peter Beinart described in the Daily Beast on August 12 as the "Opening of settlement floodgates" just two days ahead of the second round of the U.S. – sponsored Palestinian – Israeli negotiations, which were resumed in Washington D.C. on July 29, 2013.

Worse still, Kerry pragmatically defended the new "opening of settlement floodgates" as an

incentive which “underscores the importance of getting to the table … quickly,” ignoring insensitively the Palestinian reaction.

On May 18 Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said Netanyahu must choose between settlements and peace. Secretary General of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation organization (PLO), Yasser Abed Rabbo, and the PLO chief negotiator Saeb Erakat said they were considering not to participate in the second round of the talks, scheduled in Jerusalem on August 14. Member of the Executive Committee of the PLO, Hanan Ashrawi, condemned Israel ‘s latest settlement plans as “confidence-destruction measures.” Her co – member, Wasel Abu Yusuf, concluded that the PLO committed a “big mistake” by joining the Kerry – sponsored talks. Spokesman for the Palestinian presidency, Nabil Abu Rudeineh said that Israel ‘s latest plans “aim at obstructing the peace efforts.”

However, the PLO is too weak to translate its words into deeds and challenge kerry’s statement that the issue of settlements should not derail the resumed peace talks.

Israelis without Compass

Americans for Peace Now, in a report titled “Settlements & the Netanyahu Government: A Deliberate Policy of Undermining the Two-State Solution,” said that in “its policies and actions” this government “disclose a clear intention to use settlements to systematically undermine and render impossible a realistic, viable two-state solution to the Israeli Palestinian conflict.”

In a roundtable on the sidelines of the Clinton Global Initiative in New York on September 22, 2011, former U.S. President Bill Clinton blamed the “Netanyahu administration” and what he called a “demographic shift in Israel ,” which was an indirect reference to the settlement project, for the failure of the peace process.

In “A Message from a Longstanding Zionist to the Israeli People,” Robert K. Lifton, a former president of The American Jewish Congress, on this August 8 urged Israelis that they “must make clear the direction they want their country to pursue,” “separate Israel from the Palestinians,” and “avoid being ensnared in a bi – national state.”

However, Lifton’s appeal sounds like a cry in the settlers’ wilderness. Israelis have yet to liberate themselves from being hostage to these killers of peace. Until then, Israelis will continue to navigate without compass, rejecting the one – state solution, the two – state solution, the bi – national state solution and every other proposed solution for peace, except their peace – killing colonial settlement project, which Henry Siegman, referred to by The Forward on October 5, 2012 as a “Jewish elder statesman,” believes is “suicidal.”

Most likely, the settlers are drawing on the fact that Israel itself is the product of a “colonial settlement project,” which so far has proved successful; they are expectedly betting also on the “unbreakable” support of the other successful colonial settlement project that has become the United States of America .

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