

Israel to Expand Settlements After UN Vote on Palestine

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The right-wing Zionist government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has issued the go-ahead for the construction of 3,000 new housing units in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank and is putting 1,000 more on a fast track for permits. These moves are in retaliation for the United Nations General Assembly vote late Thursday night recognizing the Palestine Liberation Organization as a nonmember state.

According to Israeli officials cited Friday by the *Jerusalem Post*, the government's action will give a green light to the long-planned expansion of construction in the area known as E-1, forming a contiguous block of Israeli construction stretching from Jerusalem to Ma'aleh Adumin, the third-largest Israeli settlement inside the occupied West Bank.

The action would establish new facts on the ground rendering futile any negotiations for a so-called "two-state solution," comprised of Israel and an independent Palestinian state in areas occupied by Israel in the 1967 war. In the first instance, it would wall off the city of Jerusalem from the Palestinian territories on the West Bank, making a mockery of the long-standing demand that East Jerusalem serve as the capital of a Palestinian state. It would also further divide the West Bank into a patchwork of discontinuous bantustans, making any pretense of an independent state farcical.

Washington had formally opposed the E-1 project, and a White House spokesman Friday declared the new construction plan "counterproductive," making it "harder to resume direct negotiations or achieve a two-state solution."

The Obama administration's reaction to Israel's provocative and illegal action in the occupied West Bank was considerably more restrained than its condemnation the day before of the largely symbolic vote granting Palestine observer status at the UN.

Washington voted with Israel and just seven other countries—including Canada, the Czech Republic, Panama and four South Pacific mini-states, three of them US semi-colonies—against the UN resolution, while 138 countries voted for it and 41 others abstained.

The vote provided a distorted but unmistakable reflection of Washington's isolation because of its predatory and hypocritical policy in the Middle East and the overwhelming international revulsion over the US-backed Israeli oppression of the Palestinian people.

After this resounding defeat for the US position, US Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice delivered a petulant statement, declaring, "Today's unfortunate and counterproductive resolution places further obstacles in the path of peace." Despite its overwhelming

international support, she branded the resolution “unilateral,” meaning it was passed without the permission of Washington and Tel Aviv.

Rice, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other US officials condemned the resolution as a diversion from the so-called peace process, the US-mediated negotiations between Israel and the PLO that have dragged on for over two decades, producing only an ever-expanding land grab by Israel.

The UN action triggered calls for collective punishment in the US Congress, with bipartisan threats in both the House and Senate to cut off all US aid to the Palestinian territory.

The vote came 65 years to the day after the passage by the United Nations, at Washington’s instigation, of a 1947 resolution partitioning Palestine, then a British mandate. Under this plan, the territory, which was then 65 percent Arab and 35 percent Jewish, was split in two, with 56 percent of the land designated as a Jewish state and 43 percent as an Arab one.

Subsequent wars reduced the size of the Arab territory to just 22 percent of the original mandate, comprised of the divided territories of the West Bank and Gaza, which were themselves occupied by Israel in the 1967 war.

While the UN vote was met with limited celebrations in Ramallah, the capital of the West Bank, many Palestinians appeared to greet the action with political skepticism. “People here know that when they wake up on Friday they’ll still be living under an Israeli occupation,” *Al Jazeera’s* Nadim Baba reported from Ramallah. “They won’t, for instance, be in control of their own borders.”

The UN vote was largely promoted as a means of boosting the badly flagging prestige of Mahmoud Abbas, the chief of the Palestinian Authority. Rendered largely irrelevant during last month’s Israeli siege of Gaza and the Egyptian-mediated ceasefire that brought it to an end, Abbas had gone so far as to claim that Israel’s murderous actions were an attempt to derail his UN bid.

In addressing the UN General Assembly before the vote, Abbas vowed that he was not trying to “delegitimize” Israel, but rather to “affirm the legitimacy” of a Palestinian state. He continued, however, by referring to the recent assault on Gaza, which killed 165 Palestinians and left many hundreds more wounded.

“What permits the Israeli government to blatantly continue with its aggressive policies and the perpetration of war crimes stems from its conviction that it is above the law and that it has immunity from accountability?” he said. “The moment has arrived for the world to say clearly: Enough of aggression, settlements and occupation.”

The visceral hostility of the US and Israel to granting the Palestinian Authority upgraded status at the UN stems in large part from concern that this would allow it, or indeed any successor Palestinian government, to bring war crimes charges against Israel and its leaders at the International Criminal Court.

The British government reportedly spearheaded an effort to browbeat the Palestine Liberation Organization leadership into inserting language in the UN resolution forswearing any use of the ICC. While the PLO refused to accept such humiliating conditions, its spokesmen have insisted that it has no immediate intention of going to the ICC. Britain

abstained over the ICC issue. France, which voted for the resolution, had also sought some guarantee that the ICC would not be used against Israel.

What is universally recognized by the US and its allies in Western Europe is that the Israeli occupation, the Zionist settlements and the continuous military attacks on the Palestinian are all war crimes, which these powers support. They want to insure that the Israeli state can continue to act with impunity. Israel would inevitably brand any attempt to prosecute its war crimes as an act of "terrorism."

The turn by Abbas and the Palestinian Authority to the UN is symptomatic of the dead end reached by the Palestinian national project and a tacit admission that the US-sponsored "peace process" represents a two-decade-long fraud perpetrated upon the Palestinian people.

Institutionalized with the 1993 Oslo Accords and dedicated to the realization of a "two-state solution," this process has succeeded only in creating a terminally corrupt and dictatorial regime headed by Abbas in the West Bank, which acts as an auxiliary police for the Israeli occupation. Abbas' goal of achieving a mini-state on some portion of the 22 percent of Palestine lying outside Israel's pre-1967 borders has nothing to do with liberating the Palestinian people, but only with securing the fortunes of himself, his family and his cronies, who have become multimillionaires from USAID, CIA and European Union contracts and stipends.

The actions by Israel and the US make it clear that even such a mini-state is excluded. The continued oppression of the Palestinians combined with the right-wing social and economic policies of the Israeli government make new revolutionary convulsions in Palestine and Israel itself inevitable.

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