

US abandons attempt to stop illegal Israeli colonization

By [Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East](#)

Global Research, December 10, 2010

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the
Middle East (CJPME) 10 December 2010

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Montreal, December 10, 2010 – On Dec. 7, US State Department spokesman Philip Crowley announced that the US would no longer pursue an extension of the partial moratorium on construction in Israeli colonies (a.k.a. “settlements”) in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The Obama administration had attempted to entice the Israeli government into agreeing to an extension by offering a \$3 billion package of fighter jets and other military equipment. The significance and repercussions of the US decision is the focus of intense speculation in the Middle East and internationally.

Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu portrayed the US decision as a knock-out blow to Obama’s efforts to pressure his administration into commitments unpalatable for hardliners in his coalition. Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat expressed concern about the impact of the decision on US credibility in the region. However, it appears that Obama withdrew the offer in response to Netanyahu’s attempt to insist that East Jerusalem be excluded from the building freeze. It is also an indication that Obama may no longer be willing to proceed according to Israel’s negotiations playbook.

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) sees the Obama administration’s decision as potentially very positive in the long-term. “Whereas we would have liked to have seen a cessation of Israeli colonization of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the US was right not to cave in to Israel’s intransigence. This move could eventually become a ‘game changer,’” suggested Thomas Woodley, President of CJPME. CJPME and other observers felt that Obama’s offer of a \$3 billion military package for a paltry 3-month extension of the moratorium was excessive, given that it provided no guarantee of any principled outcome. CJPME notes that under international law, Israel’s colonization of the West Bank and East Jerusalem is strictly illegal.

The US decision comes after Israel announced plans to build another 2100 new housing units in its illegal colonies: 1300 in East Jerusalem and another 800 in Ariel, a colony jutting deep into the West Bank. The Israeli police also evicted a Palestinian family of 14 from their East Jerusalem home, which heavily-armed Israeli colonists occupied hours later.

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