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Settlements and Borders:
The role of settlements in renewed
Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations

By Professor David Newman

Introduction

The year 2009 has been characterised by important changes in the Israel-Palestine arena. The new administrations in the USA and Israel have altered the way in which business is conducted between these two allies. The Obama administration has decided to become more directly involved in the Israel-Palestine arena than the outgoing Bush administration and, as part of this re-engagement, has exerted stronger pressures on Israel to take action in freezing all new settlement activity in the occupied territories, not only in word or verbal agreement, but by actions on the ground. For its part, the new Israeli administration of Benjamin Netanyahu has partially backed away from the outgoing government's support for a two state solution, significant territorial withdrawals and evacuations of settlements. As part of his public discourse, Netanyahu has attempted to switch the emphasis from a political solution to the conflict to one of 'economic peace' and the restructuring of the Palestinian economy as a limited alternative to the implementation of major political steps. His appointment of hard line policy makers, Avigdor Lieberman as his Foreign Minister and Uzi Arad as his National Security adviser, has resulted in a greater degree of intransigence than was evident in the previous Olmert-Livni government and has also caused a drop in support for Israel amongst some of its allies abroad. Whereas pre 2009 was characterised by a close relationship between the Bush and Olmert administrations, the current period has pointed to new tensions between the USA and Israel which are yet to be resolved.

Since his well publicised speech at Bar Ilan University in June, Netanyahu has occasionally mentioned his overall commitment to a two state solution, but this has always come with major caveats – such as his insistence that the Palestinian Authority (PA) publicly recognise the State of Israel as the legitimate state of the Jewish people, or that a Palestinian state be demilitarised – and even then only as a response to pressure from the United States administration. In recent weeks, notably after his meeting with the US Envoy George

Mitchell in London, Netanyahu has also been reported by the media to have agreed to a freeze of all new settlement activity, but this has never been formally stated by the Israeli prime minister's office. On the one hand he is trying to appease the external constituency, namely Obama's administration and the European governments, whilst at the same time denying his intention to freeze settlements to his right wing constituency inside Israel. In response, some of the more right wing members of his administration have attempted to change the status of the so-called 'illegal' or 'unrecognised' settlements so that they too would also receive full government backing – the exact opposite of the demands made by the international community. Six months into the life of the new Israeli administration, the debate over settlements continues with no clear decisions or agreements while, at the same time, settlers continue to construct new homes and infrastructure on disputed territory. The recent decision by the Israeli government to authorise new housing units prior to an expected settlement freeze is indicative of a dual language on the part of the Israeli government. This dual language satisfies neither the Palestinians, who vehemently oppose any new construction activity and view this development as designed to destroy any return to the negotiating table, nor the settler lobby who oppose any form of freeze, present or future, and are not prepared to accept additional housing units now in return for a freeze later.

This paper sets out to explore the role of settlements in a renewed Israel/Palestine peace agreement. Following a brief overview of the settlement network and its components, the paper addresses two issues which have gained prominence in recent months – the American and European demands for a freeze of all further settlement activity, and the (Israeli) distinction between 'legal' and 'illegal' settlements. The final section of the paper examines the impact of settlements on two major components of any future peace agreement: the demarcation of borders between separate Israeli and Palestinian states; and the

ability of any Israeli government to remove by force tens of thousands of settlers who will reject any such evacuation. Opposition to forced settlement evacuation will be much larger than it was during the Gaza withdrawal, not only because of the number of settlers involved but also because of the general scepticism amongst the Israeli public following the withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 and the subsequent rocket warfare which took place. The paper is written from an Israeli perspective and attempts to clarify some of the key issues with which Israeli governments will have to grapple if a full or partial territorial withdrawal from the West Bank is to be implemented.

Settlement overview

The use of the term 'settlements' can be misleading. The West Bank settlement network (excluding the new neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem) numbers some 300,000 residents. The settlements are organised through a structured system of local government units, according to their size and location. There are a few larger settlements which have full 'city' status, while other self standing settlements have acquired the independent municipal status of local councils, with the remaining settlements which have not yet reached the necessary size thresholds required for independent municipal status organised through a system of five regional councils which cover the entire West Bank territory. The municipal functions, budgets and operational activities, including the election of local mayors and council members, are part and parcel of the system of local government which operates throughout Israel. This is despite the fact that, according to all international conventions governing the conduct of an occupying power in occupied territories, Israel is prevented from extending civilian law and civilian activities beyond the Green Line (the administrative line separating Israel from the West Bank since the Rhodes Armistice Talks of 1949). This notwithstanding, the municipal boundaries of communities either side of the Green Line boundary are contiguous with that boundary. On paper, it is the Civilian Administration of Israel's military authorities who have to give

permission and authorise all civilian and municipal activities beyond the Green Line but, in practice, the activities are identical to those that go on inside Israel proper.

The West Bank municipal system operates in the same geographical space as Palestinian villages and townships, but within an entirely separate and parallel system of local government. Within this system of dual space there is no coordination between the Israeli and Palestinian networks, even in areas of potential mutual benefit, such as road infrastructure, environmental hazards and other regional functions. There is a different allocation of resources to these two separate systems of local government, with the Israeli settlements enjoying a much higher level of public service provision. Whilst the settlement residents enjoy all the same benefits as Israeli citizens, the Palestinians, whose services are provided by the PA, do not share in citizenship, social or welfare benefits.

Given the fragmented nature of the municipal and planning frameworks in the West Bank, the settlement leaders do not always adhere to the planning laws and regulations which operate inside Israel. Settlement leaders are often able to push ahead with settlement expansion, including the construction of public buildings and institutions, without undergoing the full statutory planning process. The Civilian Administration of the Israeli military authorities often turns a blind eye to settlement construction activities which would not have been allowed inside the Green Line and Israel proper, including in cases which contravene Israeli planning laws and regulations.

Some of the settlements have fully fledged industrial zones, large educational institutes and high schools, commercial areas and the like. Much of the funding for this is direct from central Israeli government coffers (roads, infrastructure, schools, welfare services etc.) while others are financed by private funding, often from abroad and particularly from settler support groups in North America, much in the same way as hospitals, universities and other

public institutions are funded by external support. The largest of the institutions is the Ariel Academic College, in the Ariel settlement bloc east of Tel Aviv, which teaches full degree courses, is recognised as a college by the Ministry of Education and consists of some 6,000 students. Their application to be accepted as a fully fledged university has been rejected by the Council for Higher Education on the grounds that the college does not have the right to operate beyond the Green Line. Fresh attempts to gain full university accreditation are likely to be made by the present right wing administration, even if the Council for Higher Education continues in its refusal.

The educational network for settler children is well developed. Given the right wing government support for settlements, many of these communities enjoy even better educational facilities than those inside Israel proper. Education is one of the largest employers of settler women. Together with the large municipal structures which are also funded through the public purse, employment within the public sector explains the ability of much of the settler population, especially women, to find gainful employment within their communities or immediate region without having to commute in to the major Israeli metropolitan centres of Tel Aviv or Jerusalem on a daily basis. Not only does this enable a semblance of stability and normality in their daily lives, but it also removes some of the fear accompanying travel on West Bank roads, and the potential violence and terrorism that this entails. This is ironic in that the settlers came to the West Bank as a means of demonstrating their control of the region, but now find themselves controlled by it and unable to travel on the roads without additional security protection on the part of the Israeli army. The electrified security fences and the additional reserve soldiers guarding the entrances to the settler communities are often the first things seen by new residents on their arrival.

It is almost impossible to arrive at a precise figure of the amount of public funding which has been invested in the settlement network

since its inception, or even on a yearly basis. Government data, which is publicised fully in Israel, does not have a clear regional component – one of the reasons being not to show how the West Bank is a resource rich region, especially when compared to Israel's peripheral regions in the Galilee (in the north) or the Negev (in the south). Limited analysis of resources funnelled to the West Bank can be gained by looking separately at the municipal budgets, or the regional budgets for the Ministry of Housing and Construction or the Ministry of Education, but any attempt to arrive at a concise figure is fraught with difficulties.

Definition I: What is meant by 'settlement freeze'?

The major tension to have emerged between the USA and Israel during the past six months concerns the halting of settlement construction activities. The United States has demanded a complete cessation of all such construction, while Israel has insisted that a settlement freeze should only apply to the establishment of new settlements and not to construction of housing for the natural growth within existing settlements. Given the demographic composition of many of the settlements, young religious people with large families, the settlements continue to experience fairly rapid internal growth. There is a demand within many of these communities for the construction of new residential units which Israel argues should not be prevented. For its part, the USA demands that all forms of expansion, be it the establishment of new settlements or the construction of additional housing within existing settlements, is illegal and must cease altogether.

Settlement construction and expansion has continued almost unabated since 1967, particularly since 1977 following the rise to power of Israel's first right wing government under Menachem Begin, and the establishment of the Gush Emunim settlement movement. There has not been a single period since the late 1970's when settlement expansion has not taken place, including during the pro-peace governments of Yitzchak Rabin in the early

1990's or the Ehud Barak administration some years later. Different governments have offered economic incentives to settlers (lower mortgages, cheap land, lower rates of taxation), with right wing Likud governments offering higher incentives than the Labor governments. Much of the recent increase in settler numbers has been within the ultra-orthodox Haredi communities, most notably Betar Illit. The residents of these communities do not share the ideological zeal for a 'Greater Israel' that their religious nationalist counterparts demonstrate. Cheap housing in close proximity to Jerusalem is the major factor drawing them to the West Bank, in locations close to the Green Line border which do not necessitate travel in dangerous areas. They would have little problem in accepting compensation for eventual settlement evacuation. However, their geographical location would suggest that their communities would be included inside Israel as a result of boundary re-demarcation and, as such, evacuation would not be a relevant option in these cases.

Since the mid-1970's, settlement freezes have been a topic of negotiation between Israel's major political parties as they put together national unity coalition governments, a product of Israel's proportional electoral system. The first such agreement was made between Shimon Peres and Yitzchak Shamir back in the 1980's. This deal relied, for the first time, on making a distinction between freezing all 'new' settlement activity and the consolidation and expansion of existing settlements. But at no time, despite all mentions of settlement freezes in some of the government coalition agreements, has there ever been a complete halt in settlement activity. Over time, small settlements have undergone internal consolidation and expansion, eventually reaching the minimum size thresholds necessary for the efficient provision of municipal and public services, thus reducing their political dependency on government subsidies and handouts. In this sense, the freeze on new settlement activity in the mid-1980's proved to be a major factor in enabling the many small settlements to grow and become

more viable, rather than weaken their position within the political landscape.

Definition II: What is meant by 'legal' and 'illegal' settlements?

There has been much discussion within Israel concerning the distinction between 'legal' and 'illegal' settlements. The former consist of the bulk of the settlements which have been established with official government permits, have received public funding and which are organised through the system of local government described above. The latter, also known as hilltop outposts, are characterised by small areas of prefabricated huts, caravans and privately purchased Palestinian property, populated by young radical settlers who reject any notion that the government can prevent them from settling anywhere in the 'Land of Israel'. It is these 'illegal' settlements which have been the subject of recent evacuation and forced removal by the army but, even in these cases, evacuations have often proved very difficult to implement. The young settlers delay the evacuation through court appeals, barricading themselves in their huts and by drawing on the support of similar minded supporters who assist them in preventing the army from evacuating them. When evacuation of these few huts in one or two locations does take place, it is accompanied by much violence and media coverage. Often, once the army and media have gone away, the settlers return and rebuild their outposts within a few days.

Many existing settlements have expanded by incorporating the 'illegal' settlements which have purposely been constructed on neighbouring hilltops. Thus, even the Israeli distinctions become meaningless as the 'illegal' eventually become 'legal'. The difficulties encountered in evacuating such small settlements are sometimes used by Israeli governments to show the world that, a) they do forcefully remove settlements but also, b) that large numbers of Israeli citizens are opposed to even small evacuations, thus demonstrating how difficult it will be to evacuate tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of settlers. This does not mean that the previous Kadima

government, or the present Defence Minister Ehud Barak, do not genuinely want to remove all of the hilltop outposts, but this issue is not at the top of their political agendas. They are also very aware of the fact that, in any peace agreement necessitating substantial settlement evacuations, the so called 'illegal' settlements will not be the main problem to deal with.

From an international perspective, this distinction is entirely fictitious. Settlements constitute civilian, not military or defensive activities and, as such, are forbidden from being built in occupied territories under all relevant international conventions. Thus, from the international perspective, all settlements are illegal, whether they are towns of 10,000 residents, or hilltop outposts with 20 occupants. Attempts by Israeli governments to persuade the international community that it will freeze all new settlement activity, and that all construction which does take place is unauthorised and 'illegal', therefore avoid addressing the main issue.

The impact of settlements on the demarcation of state borders

There has been much discussion, particularly at the Track II level, concerning the ability to redraw a future Israel-Palestinian boundary which will take into account the territorial, political and security concerns of both sides. Needless to say, an acceptable boundary re-demarcation must be the outcome of a bilateral process – it cannot be unilaterally imposed by one side on the other, as has been the case with the Security Barrier. An inability to reach a bilateral agreement would either signal the failure to arrive at a resolution to the conflict, or would necessitate a return to the single default line which exists – namely the Green Line – which has formally separated Israel from the West Bank ever since the Armistice Agreements in 1949. The occupation of the West Bank by Israel in 1967 has done nothing to change the formal status of that line, although that in itself does not accord it the status of an international legal boundary – it remains an armistice line.

With a few minor exceptions, Israeli communities are located on one side of the line with their outer borders contiguous with the Green Line. This is in accordance with international law which does not allow for the transfer of civilian activities into occupied territories. No Israeli local government authorities consist of communities on both sides of the Green Line – either they operate inside Israel or in the West Bank, exclusively so.

From an Israeli perspective, the fragmented West Bank map resulting from the two Oslo Agreements in the mid-1990's was affected by two major factors – security and settlements. The territorial outcome of the Oslo II Agreements was a map consisting of three different types of Palestinian 'Autonomy Areas', bypass roads, exclaves and enclaves and widespread territorial discontinuity. This was largely due to the fact that the government felt unable to deal with the issue of settlement evacuation (at a time when the total numbers were only two thirds of what they are today). Thus every settlement, however small or isolated, had to remain under full Israeli control with unhindered road access from the settlement to Israel, giving rise to a fragmented, territorially discontinuous map, extremely vulnerable to political instability and the intrusion of violent peace spoilers on both sides.

Discussions over the future borders of a Palestinian state have advanced since the mid-1990's. Firstly, there is no longer the security demand that the Jordan valley remain under Israeli control, given the changed security situation along Israel's eastern border and in the neighbouring states of Jordan and Iraq. There is also a clear understanding that, for a territorial withdrawal to work, the Palestinian state must have full territorial contiguity and be as compact as possible. A state fragmented into many small disconnected parts simply will not work (although the issue of the territorial link between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are still to be resolved – see below). Compact and contiguous territory requires, by definition, that

any Israeli settlements on the Palestinian side of the border will have to be evacuated, assuming that the option of Jews remaining in situ as citizens of a Palestinian State is totally unrealistic.

A return to the Green Line separating Israel from the West Bank since 1949 would require mass evacuation of all 300,000 settlers and their communities (excluding East Jerusalem), something which would result in major internal strife within Israel. Assuming that no Israeli government is prepared to undertake such a task, it remains necessary to redraw the future border, with Israel retaining control over the major settlement blocs which are in close proximity to the Green Line and which could ostensibly be annexed into Israel. Israel, for its part, would have to compensate the Palestinian state with an equal amount of territory from within Israel on the other side of the line. Whereas a plan for territorial exchange would have sounded no more than a wild dream 10-15 years ago, it has become an increasing part of the political discourse between the two sides in recent years, born out of a mutual understanding of the reality of the changed geographical situation which has emerged during the 40 years since the settlement project began to be implemented on the ground. It does not make settlements any more or less legal or illegal, moral or immoral, but it does point the way to an understanding that the fewer settlements Israel will have to evacuate, the greater the chance of it succeeding in the implementation of a West Bank withdrawal. At the same time, it points to an Israeli recognition of the fact that the territorial size of a future Palestinian state cannot be any less than the area of land encompassed by the West Bank as this is already perceived, on the Palestinian side, as constituting a major territorial compromise.

Thus settlements play a major role in the border negotiations, past and present. They have changed the geographic and demographic realities on the ground and their relative location vis a vis the Green line, especially in the case of the larger settlement blocs of Gush

Etzion south of Jerusalem and Elkana-Ariel in the centre of the country, may yet determine the ultimate course of the future boundary. The unilateral construction of the Separation Barrier has, to a large extent, reflected this situation. Seventy percent of the Separation Barrier corresponds to the course of the Green Line, while the thirty percent that deviates from the Green Line is in areas where Israeli settlements in the West Bank have been included within the new territorial border.

Unlike the many challenges already discussed, 'constructing' a territorial link between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is not as difficult as many commentators assume. Between 1995 and 2000, immediately following the signing of the Oslo Agreements, safe passage routes between the two territories operated smoothly, allowing for the travel of thousands of Palestinians on a daily basis via Israeli civilian roads. There were few major disruptions during this period because it was in the interest of the respective Israeli and Palestinian leaders to ensure that the routes operated smoothly. There have been proposals that, under a future peace agreement – and assuming that the West Bank and Gaza will remain part of a single Palestinian State regardless of whether Fatah or Hamas are in control of these different areas – different solutions can be proposed. These range from a bridge, a sunken road, the extension of the rail system from Ashkelon to the Gaza Strip, and other options which would minimise Israeli intervention on the one hand, but without infringing on Palestinian territorial contiguity and sovereignty on the other. It would also necessitate 'open borders' for Palestinian goods being transported from one area to the other, with free access to the proposed Palestinian port in Gaza if and when it is ever constructed. It is not an ideal situation but, given a political desire by both sides to make a peace agreement work on the ground, it is possible.

Can settlements be evacuated?

The question of potential settlement evacuation as part of a peace agreement has to be

examined against the background of five interrelated factors:

- a) **An accurate understanding of what the settlement network actually consists of, as outlined in the previous paragraphs.** The majority of settlements are not a collection of prefabricated huts containing radical bedraggled groups of youths. They constitute a network of towns, villages and communities with highly developed public institutions, industrial and commercial zones. Some of the settlers are already third generation, their grandparents constituting the original settlers in the 1970's and early 1980's and their parents, now in their late 20's and early 30's, having resided within West Bank settlements all their lives. They will therefore have their own settlement experiences as young children, such as attending local schools, which will be self-perceived as a totally natural part of growing up within the community within which they were born. Their attachment and affiliation to their local region is not perceived as one of a settler/migrant/colonist but one who sees this as their natural home and place of residence. Their opposition to any forced evacuation therefore becomes more strongly entrenched the longer they have resided in these areas and, consequently, developed their own bond of attachment to their homes and surroundings.
- b) **The extent to which settlement evacuation in Gaza constitutes a precedent for further settlement evacuation in the West Bank.** In the immediate aftermath of the Gaza evacuation, many Israeli politicians and commentators argued that the relatively smooth evacuation of the 7000 to 8000 settlers was proof that future evacuations would not constitute a problem if and when it was necessary to undertake similar actions throughout the West Bank. With the passing of time, it is necessary to re-evaluate this position. Gaza does NOT constitute a precedent for any number of reasons. In the first place, the West Bank consists of 300,000 settlers, over 40 times as many residents as the Gaza Strip. Even assuming border re-demarcations and territorial exchanges which would enable 50-60 percent

of the settlements to remain on the Israeli side of the border, the number involved would still be anywhere between 100,000 and 150,000, almost twenty times the size of the Gaza community. The West Bank, or Judea and Samaria as it is known by settlers, contains the hardcore groups within the settler movement, people who relocated to the West Bank for ideological and religious reasons and will not be seduced into relocating back into Israel for financial incentives, however generous. Those settlements which could potentially be voluntarily evacuated for adequate financial compensation are largely those located in relative close proximity to the Green Line and therefore more likely to remain in situ under a bilateral agreement on border changes. Wherever the border is eventually demarcated, it is the hardliners who remain on the "wrong" side of the border and will have to be evacuated. It is these settlements and their residents who are most radically opposed to any form of territorial withdrawal or settlement evacuation.

- c) **The nature of the peace agreement and its inclusion of clauses which guarantee security from missiles and/or suicide bombings.** For an Israeli government to gain widespread support for a major territorial withdrawal and settlement evacuation, the Israeli public – especially those in the centre and moderate left – have to be convinced that the aftermath of the Gaza withdrawal will not be repeated. The withdrawal from Gaza was implemented as a unilateral Israeli measure without any coordination with the PA. Following the withdrawal and the rise to power of the more militant Hamas organisation, the number of rocket and mortar attacks on Israel underwent a significant increase. The numerous rocket attacks since 2005 have caused havoc in neighbouring Israeli towns, especially for the inhabitants of Sderot.¹ Without clear security

¹ Since 2001, there have been approximately 9,000 rocket and mortar attacks from the Gaza Strip on southern Israel. Over 6,000 of these have been fired since Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in August 2005. Source: Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Israel Intelligence Heritage & Commemoration Center (IICC)

guarantees which will prevent the firing of rockets from the West Bank into Israel, or the infiltration of a new wave of suicide bombers, it is difficult to see how any Israeli government will command sufficient support amongst the wider public for such a move. Although no referendum was undertaken in the lead up to the Gaza evacuation, it was clear that there was strong public support inside Israel for its implementation. Withdrawal from the West Bank has always been seen as a more difficult move to gain support for, given its historical place within Jewish/Israeli national and religious ideology, its proximity to the Israeli metropolitan centres and main airport, and the larger number of settlers involved. Yet it is widely believed that, given a clear peace agreement with the necessary guarantees, the majority of the Jewish public would support such a move, albeit not by a huge majority. In the aftermath of the Gaza evacuation, many of those who supported evacuation have now had second thoughts. They do not support the settler cause any more than they did in the past, but they do not believe that further withdrawals will increase their situation of safety and security and, as such, are less prepared to support a military withdrawal without clear guarantees – probably involving a proactive third party patrolling the borders and preventing the firing of rockets over the new border.

- d) **The willingness of an Israeli government, even a strongly pro-peace government, to take on a settler population and its nationwide supporters with potential violent consequences and subsequent alienation of groups within Israeli society.** This cannot be underestimated. The religious Zionist population who form the hardcore of the settler movement are strongly pro-national and have made significant contributions to many other social and educational spheres within society. They educate their youth to be patriotic and loyal and to serve in high profile combat units within the army. Their daily contribution to Israeli society and politics, both positive and negative, is disproportional to their size within the Israeli population as a whole –

approximately 15 percent. But their single-minded ideological conviction of the justness of their cause explains the practical intensity of their political behaviour – as settlers, as demonstrators and as lobbyists. Settlement evacuation is, for these groups, a betrayal on the part of the state. In the wake of the Gaza evacuation, there were voices within this sector, especially amongst the more radical younger generations, which supported their own disengagement from the state ethos – a retreat into their own religious ghettos, refusal to serve in the army, or to undertake other social activities which contribute to the development of the state. The increase in the number of young religious soldiers occupying senior positions within the army also raises fears that significant numbers of similar minded soldiers will refuse, on ideological grounds, to take part in any order to assist in the evacuation of their friends and families. A refusal to undertake forced evacuation, heard from some religious soldiers prior to the Gaza evacuation, is expected to happen in very large numbers should West Bank settlers be forcefully evacuated. There is a fear that alienation from the state will take place at a much wider level if tens of thousands of settlers and their families are forcefully evacuated from their homes. At the time of the Gaza withdrawal, the national religious Rabbis, who vehemently opposed settlement evacuation and Israeli withdrawal from the region, were able to rein in the opposition of the more radical elements. Given the numbers of protestors likely to be involved in a West Bank withdrawal, coupled with the fact that the legitimacy of the Rabbi's leadership was questioned by these radical groups after Gaza, these same leaders may be unable, or even unwilling, to call a halt to violent opposition the next time round. All Israeli governments are fearful of these consequences and, given the uncertain short term benefits of the implementation of a peace agreement along the lines implemented in Gaza (ie. total withdrawal and evacuation), many moderate government ministers are not prepared, at this stage, to publically support mass evacuation.

e) **Post-evacuation plans for the smooth and efficient resettlement of settler evacuees. There has been widespread criticism of the Israeli government for the way in which it managed the post-evacuation resettlement and relocation of the Gaza settlers.** In the summer of 2009, a full four years after the Gaza evacuation, there are still groups of evacuated Gaza settlers who do not yet have a permanent home and/or have not managed to find alternative employment. Some families have experienced internal stress and break up. The government argues that, had the settlers been prepared to discuss evacuation alternatives prior to the evacuation, much of this disorganisation would have been avoided. Had they been prepared to accept the political realities, they would have been part of the planning and implementation process involved in relocation and it would, so the government argues, have been implemented much more smoothly and with far less distress and long term disorientation. Notwithstanding this lack of discussion, even after the Gaza evacuation had been completed, it still took an inordinate amount of time for many of the settlers to be resettled and adequately compensated. Any future evacuation will have to prepare the blueprints for resettlement in a more efficient manner, with or without the direct involvement of the settlers themselves.

Key recommendations for UK Policy to aid settlement withdrawals and the realisation of a two state solution:

- The UK should, together with the EU, continue to push for a solution to the conflict based on a two state solution, while adopting an even handed policy of pressure to both sides of the conflict, in order to make the necessary compromises and move forward from the present impasse.
- The UK government should voice its support for a cessation of all Israeli construction activity beyond the Green Line, be it within existing settlement boundaries or not. The UK must make clear that this is a vital goodwill gesture ahead of renewed peace negotiations with the Palestinians. Construction within existing settlements makes evacuations more

difficult and thus undermines those on both sides of the conflict that want to see peace talks succeed.

- The UK, without changing its position on the legality or illegality of West Bank settlements, should acknowledge the political difficulties in Israel of large-scale settlement evacuation. It should work towards supporting a policy of staged withdrawal, hopefully accompanied by a growth in confidence amongst the Israeli population as each stage is implemented. This should include acknowledging the negative consequences of previous withdrawals.
- The UK should use clear language with regard to West Bank settlements in order to break down the false Israeli distinction between 'legal' and 'illegal' communities. To achieve a two state solution many of the settlements will have to be evacuated, whether they were officially approved by Israeli planning authorities or not.
- Given the experience of the Gaza withdrawal, the UK should work with the international community to agree specific security guarantees for Israel, prior to final status negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians. These measures should aim to ensure that an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank does not result in renewed violence, or the firing of rockets and missiles, from the Palestinian state into Israel. The UK must be prepared to send support troops and advisors to work with the PA to create stability along the border and throughout the Palestinian state.
- The UK should support the redrawing of borders between Israel and a Palestinian state, to take into account the geographical realities on the ground. However, any desire by Israel to redraw the boundaries so as to include settlements inside Israel must be accompanied by Israeli willingness to cede an equal amount of land from inside Israel to the Palestinian state.
- The UK should state its commitment to a single Palestinian state which comprises both the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The UK government should support the development of transportation links between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, in such a way as to ensure the territorial integrity of the State of Israel, while

ensuring the safe and unhindered passage of Palestinians along the route.

Conclusion

The ongoing discussion between Israel, the USA and European administrations concerning a potential settlement freeze largely ignores the fact that, for any future peace settlement to be implemented, Israel will have to undertake a forced evacuation of anywhere between 150,000 and 300,000 settlers. It is not clear whether Israeli governments will be able to implement such a major project without facing huge internal strife, significant opposition and violence from tens, perhaps even hundreds of thousands, of ideologically and religiously motivated settlers, and their supporters throughout Israel. For there to be any chance of success of a mass evacuation, there have to be clear international guarantees that such a withdrawal will maintain Israel's security and that the Gaza experience will not repeat itself on an even larger scale. While the endless discussions continue, the settler population continues to increase on a daily basis as the settler leaders and planners continue to construct new buildings, regardless of whether they have formal government authorisation for these activities or not.

The location of individual settlements, as opposed to their classification as 'legal' or 'illegal' by Israel, will play a major factor in the eventual demarcation of borders between separate Israeli and Palestinian states, which will likely involve territorial exchanges between the two sides. However, whilst such land swaps will reduce the number of settlements to be evacuated, they will not necessarily reduce the overall political problems involved in its implementation. Only robust planning and strong leadership by the Israeli government, coupled with a long-term commitment on the part of the international community to help maintain security, will inspire enough confidence amongst the Israeli people to make the necessary evacuations work.

As mentioned, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has cautiously backed the concept of an independent Palestinian state. Whilst he has not openly discussed the prospect of settlement evacuations, he is in negotiations with the US administration over maintaining a freeze in settlement construction activities in the West Bank ahead of peace talks with the Palestinians. However, recent government approvals for a significant number of building projects in the West Bank demonstrate that, if he is to make the territorial compromises required for peace, he will have to do a better job at standing up to his right-wing coalition partners from now on.

David Newman is Professor of Political geography at Ben-Gurion University and the editor of the international journal of Geopolitics. An expert on West Bank settlement policy, he has researched and published on issues relating to the settlement movement, Gush Emunim and their impact on the peace process and the demarcation of Israeli and Palestinian borders.



Labour Friends of Israel

BM LFI London WC1N 3XX

Email mail@lfi.org.uk

Website www.lfi.org.uk