



## June 30, 2009

**Daily News Issue Date:** June 30, 2009

**News Blurb:** A report by Human Rights Watch criticizes Israeli drone strikes carried out during the Gaza war (1). Several articles assess the issues involved in a potential Israeli settlement freeze (2) (3) (7) (12). Mohammad Yaghi looks at the financial crisis within the Palestinian Authority (5). The Palestinian Authority reports that Hamas had allegedly planned attacks on PA officials in the West Bank(9) (16). Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak is set to begin talks with Special Mideast envoy George Mitchell in New York today (10) (15). A poll released today shows support for Hamas is waning among Palestinians (18).

### Report Criticizes Israeli Drone Strikes

**Article Author(s):** Christopher Drew

**Media Outlet:** The New York Times

**Date:** June 30, 2009

**Source Link(s):** [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/01/world/middleeast/01gaza.html?\\_r=2&ref=world&pa...](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/01/world/middleeast/01gaza.html?_r=2&ref=world&pa...)

[1]

Twenty-nine civilians, including eight children, were killed in several missile strikes by Israeli drones in Gaza in December and January, according to a report released on Tuesday by Human Rights Watch. The group questioned whether Israeli forces had taken "all feasible precautions" to avoid civilian casualties.

Lt. Col. Avital Leibovich, a spokeswoman for the Israeli military, said Israeli forces had gone to extraordinary lengths to warn civilians during the Gaza offensive, and she questioned the credibility of some of the Palestinian witnesses cited by the advocacy group.

The report represented the latest in a series of accusations of civilian abuse in the Gaza war. And it raised broader concerns about how carefully the remote-controlled drones are being used, much like the complaints that the Central Intelligence Agency has encountered in its use of drones to attack members of the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Pakistan.

The report was partly written by Marc Garlasco, the senior military analyst at Human Rights Watch who was a weapons-targeting official at the Pentagon from 1997 to 2003.

Mr. Garlasco has praised the American military's use of drones in Iraq and Afghanistan, saying that their ability to hover over a target for many hours had improved the accuracy of many missile attacks and limited civilian casualties.

The group's findings in Gaza suggest that "the weapon itself isn't the problem," he said in an interview. "It's the way it's used that is."

He added: "The operators have the ability to distinguish between combatants and civilians and can even divert the missiles after launch. So it's hard to understand how the Israelis did such a poor job of targeting."

Mr. Garlasco said the report, which was released at a news conference in Jerusalem on Tuesday morning, was based on interviews with witnesses to six drone attacks and an examination of debris that suggested a standard drone-fired missile had been used.

The report said one missile had hit a group of university students who were waiting for a bus in the center of Gaza City, while another struck a truck hauling oxygen tanks, and a third smashed into a school sheltering people who had lost or left their homes.

In three other attacks, the report said, the victims were six children, ranging in age from 10 to 15, who were playing on rooftops in residential neighborhoods. Six other children were wounded. Muhammad al-Habbash, the father of one of the girls who was killed, told the human rights group that some of the children were feeding chickens that the family kept on the roof when the missile struck. At another house, Nahla Allaw said her son's legs were crushed and blood poured from small holes in his chest as he died.

While fighters from Hamas, the militant Palestinian faction that controls Gaza, often placed artillery spotters on rooftops, these drone attacks took place early in the conflict before Israeli forces approached Gaza City's central neighborhoods, the report said.

When asked about the rooftop attacks, Colonel Leibovich, the Israeli military spokeswoman, said, "This is the first time I am hearing of these specific incidents."

The report said the attacks were a subset of the 42 drone strikes reported by Palestinian organizations, which estimated that as many as 87 civilians had been killed in them.

Israel has said that over all, 1,166 people were killed in the Gaza offensive. Of those, 295 were noncombatants, 709 were Hamas fighters and 162 were men whose affiliations could not be identified, Israeli officials have said.

Colonel Leibovich said Israel did not calculate how many people were killed by different weapons systems, like drones.

After the drone attack on the truck, the Israel Defense Forces released videotape contending that it had killed men who were loading rockets. The military later acknowledged that the cylinders on the truck were oxygen tanks. But the Israeli military still maintains that four of the men who were killed in the incident were Hamas operatives, an assertion that their families deny, the Human Rights Watch report said.

Colonel Leibovich said few military forces had ever taken as many precautions to minimize civilian casualties as Israel did in Gaza, dropping 500,000 leaflets warning people that its forces were arriving and even making telephone calls to neighbors of suspected Hamas fighters.

During the fighting in Gaza, "there were also numerous cases where pilots had to reverse the missiles because they saw civilians enter the area," she said.

P. W. Singer, the author of a recent book on military robots called "Wired for War," said Israel may also be finding that using the drones "certainly raises the bar of expectations."

"Because you can target more precisely, people hold you to a higher standard," he said.

# In the West Bank, Suburb or Settlement?

**Article Author(s):** Howard Schneider

**Media Outlet:** The Washington Post

**Date:** June 30, 2009

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/29/AR2009062904150...>

[2]

Chaim Hanfling knows a lot about this settlement's population boom. Six of his 11 siblings have moved here from Jerusalem in recent years to take advantage of the lower land prices, and at age 29, he has added four children of his own.

Located just over the Green Line that marks the territory occupied in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the booming ultra-Orthodox community, home to more than 41,000 people, shows why the settlement freeze demanded by the Obama administration is proving controversial for Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and also why Palestinian officials are insisting on it.

Amid their gleaming, modern apartment buildings, with Tel Aviv visible on the horizon, residents say they have little in common with the people who have hauled mobile homes to hilltops in hopes of deepening Israel's presence in the occupied West Bank. But they are having lots of babies -- and they expect the bulldozers and cement mixers to keep supplying larger schools and more housing, a typically suburban demand that the country's political leadership is finding hard to refuse.

"We don't feel this is a settlement," said Hanfling. "We're in the middle of the country. It's like Tel Aviv or Ramat Gan," another Israeli city.

Across a nearby valley, residents of the Palestinian village of Bilin have watched in dismay as Modiin Illit has grown toward them and an Israeli barrier has snaked its way across their olive groves and pastureland. Two years ago, Israel's Supreme Court ordered the fence relocated, but nothing has happened. A weekly protest near the fence, joined by sympathetic Israelis and foreigners, has led to a steady stream of injuries, with protesters hit by Israeli fire and Israeli troops struck by rocks. One villager, Bassem Abu Rahmeh, died in April when a tear gas canister hit him in the chest.

The court said, 'Move the fence,' so why is he dead?" villager Basel Mansour said as he surveyed the valley between Bilin and Modiin Illit from his rooftop. "Why hasn't it been moved?"

Amid a dispute with the Obama administration over the future of West Bank settlements, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak left for the United States on Monday for talks with White House special envoy George J. Mitchell. Local news reports say he may propose a temporary construction freeze of perhaps three months, though Netanyahu's office said it is committed to "normal life" proceeding.

Of the nearly 290,000 Israelis who live in West Bank settlements, nearly 40 percent reside in three areas -- Modiin Illit, Betar Illit and Maale Adumim -- where the impact of a settlement freeze would probably be felt most deeply.

Debate over West Bank settlements is separate from discussion of Jerusalem, which both Israelis and Palestinians claim as their national capital. The Obama administration has also asked Israel to freeze construction in Jerusalem neighborhoods occupied after the 1967 war.

"The goal is to find common ground with the Americans," said Netanyahu spokesman Mark Regev. "Israel is willing to be creative and flexible."

Palestinian officials said Monday that they will not restart peace talks with Israel until a full settlement freeze is declared.

A trip across the valley outside Modiin Illit shows why the settlements remain a central Palestinian concern.

When the Israeli barrier was built around Modiin Illit, it looped into Palestinian territory -- too far, according to the Israeli Supreme Court, whose 2007 decision said that the route went farther than security needs required in order to make room for more building in the settlement.

Planned additions to the community have since been canceled by the Defense Ministry, which is in charge of construction in the West Bank. Israel Defense Forces Central Command spokesman Peter Lerner said the military has designed a new route for the fence that will return land to Bilin, but has not received funding.

The lack of an agreed-upon border, Palestinian officials and human rights groups said, figures into a variety of problems -- such as the violence that flares regularly between Palestinians and settlers, as well as larger policy matters. The rights group B'Tselem said in a recent report that neither Israel nor the Palestinian Authority is taking clear responsibility for wastewater treatment in settlements or Palestinian towns and villages -- putting local drinking water at risk.

Facing U.S. demands, Israel has said it will take no more land for settlement and has agreed to remove more than 20 unauthorized outposts. But even that has proved slow going. The government recently proposed dismantling the outpost of Migron, a settlement of about 40 families that is under legal challenge for being built on private Palestinian land, by expanding another settlement nearby.

"The individuals in outposts shouldn't be rewarded" for building illegally, said Michael Sfard, an attorney for the group Peace Now who helped prepare a lawsuit against Migron.

In the City Hall of Modiin Illit, such struggles seem part of a different world. Pointing from a hillside to bulldozers busy in one part of town and graded sites ready for building in another, Mayor Yaakov Guterman said the city has 1,000 apartments under construction but is running out of room. Modiin Illit can't expand to the west, back over the Green Line, he said, because that is a designated Israeli forest area. He said the community should be allowed to spread to the surrounding valley because, in his view, Modiin Illit "will be on the Israeli side" of the border under any final peace deal. Meanwhile, he said, local families are having dozens of new babies every week, a boom that a construction freeze would "strangle."

"It'd be a death sentence," he said.

## **In two Israeli settlements, a booming demand for more space**

**Article Author(s):** Joshua Mitnick

**Media Outlet:** The Christian Science Monitor

**Date:** June 29, 2009

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0629/p06s13-wome.html> [3]

A stack of moving boxes packed with religious books is tucked into the corner of Yossi and Racheli Zehnwirth's apartment salon.

Three years ago, the couple arrived as newlyweds in this devoutly religious settlement ? the second largest in the West Bank ? with the hopes of buying their own home, a goal beyond reach 15 minutes away in Jerusalem.

Now, with two young boys, the family is moving to a rental half the size of their current apartment because they can't keep up with property values buoyed by high birthrates among ultra-Orthodox Jews and the demand from newcomers escaping overcrowded cities.

"Here we ride in bullet-proof buses for the price," says Mr. Zehnwirth. "Now we don't even have the [low] price any more."

As the Obama administration pushes for a total West Bank settlement freeze and Israel insists on allowing continued expansion inside existing settlements, Beitar and a second ultra-religious city, Modiin Illit, illustrate the roots of the dispute over Israeli development on land claimed by the Palestinians for a future state.

Planned by the Israeli government as a housing solution for religious sects with high birthrates and a preference for living in cloistered neighborhoods, building in the two settlements took off after the Oslo peace process began in 1993. Runaway growth has made the two cities account for one-fourth of the 300,000 Israelis spread over more than 100 settlements in the West Bank, not including Israeli neighborhoods of East Jerusalem.

But because these settlements are located relatively close to Israel proper, an agreement on a border modification and land swap is a realistic option for resolving the dispute here. Even though they have moved into the vortex of a decades-old geopolitical dispute, the residents of these communities are not nationalists like those at the forefront Jewish settler movement who seek territorial expansion.

"We didn't come here for politics or to fight. We want to live in the land of Israel, but it doesn't matter where ? east or west," says Beitar Illit Mayor Meir Rubenstein. "To our great misfortune, the government put us here and now we're stuck with Obama."

### Israel continues settlement expansion

The dispute over settlements has opened up the most public dispute between Israel and the US in about two decades. On Monday, Israel announced it had approved 50 new housing units in a settlement north of Jerusalem to accommodate settlers being moved from an outpost without government approval. In a policy speech earlier this month, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that although Israel won't build new settlements, it will permit construction to allow existing communities to expand normally.

Last week, the G-8 and the Quartet of Peace process sponsors joined the call for a complete settlement freeze.

### With rapid population growth, high demand for housing

Beitar Illit is about a 20-minute drive southwest of Jerusalem. The settlement looks out onto hilltops dotted by red-roofed houses that are part of the "Etzion bloc," a group of suburban settlements which left-wing Israeli governments have sought to annex in a land swap with Palestinians in previous negotiations.

The annual population growth in Beitar is nearly twice the overall rate of about 5 percent for the West Bank

settlements. Mr. Rubenstein complained that Beitar Illit is planned to include 10,000 housing units, but there are permits for only 7,000 ? the remainder are on hold until further notice.

Despite complaints among residents of Beitar Illit and other areas that the government isn't giving enough building permits, data published in March by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics on housing starts in the West Bank showed a 42 percent increase in 2008 compared with 2007.

Peace groups complain that the population in the settlements increased about 50 percent in the last decade. Regarding the dilemma faced by the ultra-religious settlements, peace groups say that the government should encourage them to live inside Israel proper.

"Israel is constructing in a way that they limit the ability of Palestinians to use their own land," says Dror Etkes, a settlement expert at the human rights watchdog Yesh Din. "I grew up in Jerusalem and I cannot afford to live there even if I wanted. Who in the country has a guarantee they'll be able to live five minutes from their home? Only the settlers are asking for this."

Religious groups take refuge from modernity in settlements

Because strictly religious Jewish groups seek to block out trappings of modernity, they prefer to live in closed communities where advertising is tailored to their sensibilities and cable or satellite TV infrastructure is banned. Combined with the fact that Beitar Illit and Modiin Illit have the highest reproductive rate in the country of about eight children per woman, that has created surging demand for residential units.

Despite the slump in real estate prices around the world, values in Beitar Illit are climbing. Fraida Sterka, a local broker, said that prices have gone up 5 percent in the last two months.

"People want to live in a place that's very observant without any outside influences," says Ms. Sterka. "There's an entire community that wants to live here. There is a shortage of several thousand housing units a year."

To make do, owners are outfitting basements as apartments and closing in balconies for extra room. Because of a lack of commercial real estate in Beitar, shops have opened up in apartment buildings.

And so, in a couple of days, the Zehnwrths will move into a converted basement with one tiny window that opens into an air shaft and a second that looks out to a stairway landing.

"It's like living in a bomb shelter," says Mr. Zehnwrth. "The government promised us apartments here. They said, come and it will free up. Meanwhile, its only gotten worse."

## Israel's Man of Conscience

**Article Author(s):** Ezra Nawi

**Media Outlet:** The Nation

**Date:** June 29, 2009

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20090713/nawi> <sup>[4]</sup>

My name is Ezra Nawi. I am a Jewish citizen of Israel.

I will be sentenced on the first of July after being found guilty of assaulting two police officers in 2007 while struggling against the demolition of a Palestinian house in Um El Hir, located in the southern part of the West Bank.

Of course the policemen who accused me of assaulting them are lying. Indeed, lying has become common within the Israeli police force, military and among the Jewish settlers.

After close to 140,000 letters were sent to Israeli officials in support of my activities in the occupied West Bank, the Ministry of Justice responded that I "provoke local residents."

This response reflects the culture of deceit that has taken over all official discourse relating to the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

After all, was I the one who poisoned and destroyed Palestinian water wells?

Was I the one who beat young Palestinian children?

Did I hit the elderly?

Did I poison the Palestinian residents' sheep?

Did I demolish homes and destroy tractors?

Did I block roads and restrict movement?

Was I the one who prevented people from connecting their homes to running water and electricity?

Did I forbid Palestinians from building homes?

Over the past eight years, I have seen with my own two eyes hundreds of abuses such as these and exposed them to the public--therefore I am considered a provocateur. I can only say that I am proud to be a provoker.

Because I am a provoker, the police together with their allies have threatened me, beaten me and arrested me on numerous occasions. And when I continued to "provoke" them, they did not hesitate to out me as a gay man; indeed, they spread rumors among the Palestinians with whom I work that I have AIDS.

One of the reasons I have been singled out has to do with who I am. It is difficult to explain, but as a Mizrahi Jew (descended from Jewish communities in the Arab and Muslim world), a gay man and a plumber, I do not belong to the elite of Israeli society and do not fit the stereotype of the Israeli peacenik--namely, an intellectual Jew of Ashkenazi decent. Actually, the police officers who constantly arrest me and I are part of the same social strata. I was programmed like them, have a similar accent, know their jargon and our historical background is comparable. And yet, in their eyes I am on and for the other side, the Palestinian side.

This simple fact seems to disturb them so much that they have to vilify me; that is the only way their worldview will continue making sense. I threaten them precisely because I undermine the categories and stereotypes through which they understand the world.

But the policemen are only actors on this stage. The military, civil administration and the judicial system are all working with the police, and all of them together follow the commands of their masters, the Jewish settlers.

This unholy alliance is extremely dangerous, because for them the end--gaining full control of the Land of Israel--justifies the means. In order to advance this end they dehumanize the Palestinians; and because the Palestinians in their eyes are not human, everything is permitted. They can steal their land, demolish their homes, steal their water, imprison them for no reason and at times even kill them. In Hebrew we say damam mutar, taking their blood is permissible.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that the evil I confront every day in the West Bank could not have been carried out without the Israeli court system. Judge Eilata Ziskind not only mistakenly found me guilty but she instructed the court to invite a translator for the sentencing, as if I do not speak Hebrew; in her mind I, a Mizrahi Jew, am a Palestinian Arab--and Arabs are, almost by definition, guilty. My case is merely part of a pattern. All the crimes committed by the state and its proxies in the territories over the past four decades were made kosher by the Israeli courts. Therefore, the courts are just as much to blame for the ongoing cruelty.

Because I am a provoker the state subjects me to continuing harassment, and yet I have remained persistent. What strengthens me and gives me energy is the widespread and constant support I have always received from political allies. When I was beaten by settlers, when my car was stolen, when I was arrested, I never felt alone. I know that thousands of people, both in Israel and abroad, support what we in Ta'ayush (Jewish-Arab Partnership) are doing against the occupation.

"Ezra" in Hebrew means help, and I know that in times of trouble I can rely on my friends for help.

## The PA Financial Crisis: Causes and Implications

**Article Author(s):** Mohammed Yaghi

**Media Outlet:** The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

**Date:** June 29, 2009

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=3084> <sup>[5]</sup>

Eighteen months have passed since the Paris donor conference, where members of the international community promised the Palestinian government \$1.45 billion in assistance for its 2009 budget. The Palestinian Authority (PA), however, has received less than a quarter of this amount, and Arab governments in particular have fallen short, contributing only \$78 million of the \$600 million pledged. Palestinian prime minister Salam Fayad has been forced to borrow \$530 million from local banks this year in order to pay the salaries of PA employees, who with their families constitute one-quarter of the Palestinian population. When combined with the loss of internal revenue from the Gaza Strip since the Hamas takeover and the continuing Israeli restrictions on West Bank movement, the failure of donors to live up to their commitments threatens the tenuous economic progress the PA has made to date.

### The Current Financial Crisis

The PA's 2009 budget of approximately \$3 billion expects \$1.63 billion of internal revenue and \$1.45 billion of external funding (including \$300 million approved at the March Sharm al-Sheikh conference for Gaza reconstruction). To meet its \$250 million monthly budgetary needs, the PA relies on international donors for \$120 million of this total. According to its own financial reports, the PA received a total of \$328 million in external financing in the first five months of this year, far short of the \$600 million it required.

To cover the deficit, the PA is borrowing from private banks and drawing on excess 2008 donor aid. The record \$1.76 billion of external financing in 2008 exceeded the PA's expected budgetary support by \$130 million. The European Commission was the largest donor last year, providing \$651 million, while the United States was the largest individual donor nation, contributing \$302 million. Arab countries gave \$526 million and the World Bank granted \$283 million. The 2008 donor commitment allowed the PA to cover its \$1.12 billion deficit and ensure regular payments to PA employees, repayment of all wages in arrears (\$317 million), private sector loans (\$70 million), and some of its commercial banks loans (\$29 million).

### Reasons for the Current Budget Deficit

Three major developments have contributed to the current PA budget deficit:

**Lack of Arab government commitment to the PA budget.** While international donors pledged an impressive \$7.7 billion at the November 2007 Paris conference and \$4.2 billion at the March 2009 Sharm al-Sheikh conference to rebuild Gaza and support the PA budget, the lack of follow-through this year by Arab governments has left the Fayad government in a precarious position.

The miniscule contributions by Arab governments are particularly troubling when compared to their bold promises made at the 2007 Paris conference when Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, and Qatar together promised \$400 million in annual budget support between 2008 and 2010. As of June 15, only Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE had delivered their share -- a total of \$78 million -- of the promised aid for 2009. While Arab states contend they are withholding aid in order to pressure the Palestinian factions into forming a unity government, this approach is unrealistic and counterproductive. The Ramallah-based PA government is already spending almost half of its budget on Gaza. If the PA is forced to curtail spending on Gaza, this would only intensify the division between the West Bank and Gaza, making reconciliation more difficult.

**The loss of Gaza revenue.** Although Fayad's budget performance in 2008 was impressive, the Hamas takeover of Gaza has narrowed the tax base from which the PA is able to draw revenue. While 2008 saw overall revenues exceed budget targets due to increased economic activity in the West Bank and Fayad's administrative reforms, the PA draws revenue only from the West Bank -- there is no real income from Gaza. Indeed, while taxes collected by Israel on behalf of the PA increased in 2008 by 6.2 percent over 2007, this percentage conceals a much higher increase in the West Bank and a sharp decline in Gaza. In the West Bank, there was a 20 percent increase in value added taxes (VAT) on goods sold by Israel, and a 10 percent increase in petroleum purchases, but Gaza witnessed a sharp decline in receipts with a drop of 65 percent in VAT and 7 percent in petroleum purchases. Hamas, on the other hand, is able to raise funds in Gaza by collecting taxes and various domestic fees and by smuggling commercial goods (in addition to arms) through hundreds of tunnels under the Egyptian border. According to Tor Wennesland, the Norwegian representative in the Palestinian territories, Hamas runs nearly 1,000 tunnels (400 of which are officially approved), allowing the Islamist group to generate revenue to pay the salaries of its own employees and security forces while preventing the PA from collecting taxes on goods that would otherwise come through Israel.

**Israeli restrictions on movement.** In addition to cash donations, countries also promised to take on various development-related projects in the West Bank. In 2008, donor-financed expenditures on large infrastructure projects were estimated at about \$190 million, less than half the \$492 million commitment detailed in the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan of 2008. Cumbersome Israeli restrictions on movement resulted in frequent delays in projects and some cancellations. According to a June 8 World Bank report, "Israel's system of security has weakened the growth of the Palestinian economy and increased the dependence on the public sector." Restrictions on internal movement and goods transfers

(import/export) have hampered efforts to build a developed economy and have made the Palestinian public heavily dependent on the government; the PA is now responsible for 145,000 employees whose salaries constitute 45 percent of the total budget. While the PA has tried to invest in small community projects that are less vulnerable to Israeli movement restrictions -- water sanitation, irrigation projects, electrifying villages or rural road paving -- these smaller initiatives do not have the economic impact of the larger infrastructure projects.

## Conclusion

While Fayad's achievements are numerous -- improving law and order in the West Bank, creating a more favorable environment for local and foreign investment, reducing the back payments owed on salaries, enhancing the collection of domestic revenues, and reducing dependence on external donors -- his government faces major economic obstacles. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the West Bank's gross domestic product grew by 2.3 percent in 2008, but the lower than expected level of international donor assistance and continuing movement restrictions in the West Bank make it unrealistic for the PA to reach its 2009 growth target of 5 percent. Spending on Gaza consumes almost half of the PA budget while Israeli restrictions on movement hampers economic development and makes the Palestinians more reliant on the public sector and international aid.

The failure of donor states to deliver on their pledges this year will weaken government confidence and threaten the PA's fragile financial stability. More importantly, it signals to the Palestinian public that its government lacks international support at a time when the PA is confronting Hamas, enforcing law and order, and implementing its security obligations under the Quartet's 2003 Roadmap peace initiative. This confrontation includes recent crackdowns on two Hamas cells in Qalqilya in early June and the killing of five Hamas Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades militants.

For Washington, U.S. special Middle East envoy George Mitchell should work with Israel to ease restrictions on Palestinian movement as security improves in the West Bank, and convince the Gulf Arab states to live up to their donor commitments.

## Experts Voice New Hope for Solution to Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

**Article Author(s):** Mohamed Elshinnawi

**Media Outlet:** Voice of America

**Date:** June 29, 2009

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.voanews.com/english/2009-06-29-voa32.cfm> <sup>[6]</sup>

In the wake of U.S. President Barack Obama's June 4th speech to the Muslim world and the Israeli prime minister's recent acceptance of a conditional Palestinian state, hopes have risen for a resumption of talks aimed at resolving the long-running Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The current framework for an independent Palestinian state was first outlined in the 1993 Oslo Accords between Palestinians and Israelis. That agreement described the so-called "two-state solution" - Israel and an independent Palestine living peacefully side-by-side - as the best way to settle the protracted conflict.

Ziad Asali, president of the American Task Force on Palestine, says initial movement toward that solution was stalled by Israeli hard-liner Benjamin Netanyahu during his first term as prime minister from 1996 to

1999. But Asali believes President Obama's recent address in Cairo and other U.S. initiatives have revived interest in the issue by underscoring American support for the two-state solution and calling on Israel to freeze all settlement activities in the occupied territories.

"Settlement freeze means the end of taking lands from the Palestinians and render[ing] the Palestinian state completely impractical. So it is very important that he mentioned it, that [U.S.] congressmen - when Netanyahu came here [to the United States], talked to him about it, and it is important that [Secretary of State] Hillary Clinton talked about it. So it's an important issue, and now it adds credibility to those who advocate the two-state solution."

Asali is hopeful that negotiations might resume soon. But he concedes that the current split between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority are complicating the outlook for the Palestinian half of that two-state solution.

What does two-state solution mean?

And new questions have arisen since Obama's Cairo speech about Israeli interpretations of the two-state concept and the strict conditions set forth recently by Mr. Netanyahu, just re-elected as Israel's prime minister.

Ori Nir, spokesman for Americans for Peace Now, the U.S. branch of Israel's Peace Now movement, says Netanyahu's insistence on maintaining Israeli control of Palestinian air and sea lanes, ruling out the right of return of Palestinian refugees and rejecting U.S. calls to freeze settlements, all threaten progress toward the two-state solution. Nevertheless, Nir believes President Obama can persuade Prime Minister Netanyahu to back up his general acceptance of a Palestinian state with constructive actions.

"I think we have already seen that happening. This administration understands that in order to get some traction on the peace process, it has to lean on both sides, both on Palestinians but also on Israel," Nir says. "We have seen that with settlements. I think the issue of settlements is something that this administration will not give up on, will continue to push for, and I think when it comes to the actual substance of the final status negotiations, this administration will also exercise its authority and put forward its ideas and perhaps even an actual plan of its own."

Israeli-Palestinian conflict key to U.S.-Muslim relations

Nir says momentum toward peace can only be generated if all parties to the conflict take the kind of bold measures for which President Obama is calling. Samer Shehata, a fellow at the Washington-based Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, says President Obama clearly understands that peaceful resolution of the Palestinian issue is key to improving relations between the United States and the Muslim world, from Morocco to Malaysia.

"It is clear that President Obama has a very different perspective on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the U.S. role than the previous administration. He talked about Palestinian suffering, the daily humiliations of occupation, Palestinian dislocation, and also said that their condition was intolerable, and he talked about Palestine as a state. So this, I think, implies that the U.S. will have renewed efforts and possibly would be more balanced with regard to trying to address the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, possibly put more pressure on Israel."

United States in unique position to bring peace

And it is precisely the close U.S. relationship with Israel that will provide President Obama with the

leverage he needs to overcome these obstacles to peace, says Aaron Miller, a public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center and a former advisor to six secretaries of state on Middle East policy and the Arab-Israeli peace process.

"It is because of our intimacy that we are perceived to have leverage; Sadat got it, Arafat got it and King Hussein got it. It is the paradox of the partial mediator that is the secret of the U.S.-Israeli relationship, when we use that relationship wisely. And I would argue to you, since I participated in both Clinton and Bush, that we did not use it wisely. So maybe what Obama is doing is re-injecting some of the balance back."

Miller says he is not discouraged by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's hard-line stance on Palestine. He notes that in the past, many of Israel's most effective peace-makers have been, like Netanyahu, hawkish right-wingers, men such as Menachem Begin and Yitzah Rabin.

Miller expects President Obama will avoid confrontations with the Netanyahu government and will focus instead on his trademark "yes, we can" approach, to convince both sides of the urgent need to reach agreement. The stakes, as always, are high, Miller says: Failure to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will deepen the region's despair, weaken America's allies, and strengthen the radical forces now working to sow discord in the Middle East.

## West Bank settlers call tourists to the rescue

**Article Author(s):** Patrick Moser

**Media Outlet:** Agence France Presse (AFP)

**Date:** June 29, 2009

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hMZAMnCSul-KwbYIbkoTatzB6R-Q> <sup>[7]</sup>

This year's cherry festival was a roaring success, drawing thousands of people who enjoyed grilled kosher sausages and right-wing ideology in the emblematic Gush Etzion settlement bloc.

A band belted out its stuff as clowns entertained the wee ones and families gorged themselves on the plump cherries of the Rosh Tzurim kibbutz, one of the communities in Gush Etzion, just south of Jerusalem.

Food stalls and other small businesses did brisk trade, but the fest was about more than just fun and money.

Local tourism authorities hope such events will help boost support for Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, which are seen as a major hurdle in peace efforts with the Palestinians and have come under increasing US pressure.

"The goal is to make people discover Eretz Israel," says organiser Yoram Bitane, using the Hebrew words for Land of Israel, favoured by right-wingers to describe not only present-day Israel but also the Palestinian territories to which they claim a divine right.

"We want to make Israelis who have a negative idea of settlements come here and see for themselves," says Bitane, whose PR company promotes several Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

"We want people to know what they're talking about when making decisions on whether to give away a part of the territory or not."

Bitane has no doubt what that decision should be.

"I am Israeli, Jewish and a believer. I live here, this is my house, my land. No discussion."

He is also convinced tourism is a perfect tool to draw support and believes that if Israel had done more to attract visitors to Gaza at the time, it would not have needed to pull out its troops and settlers from the Palestinian territory in 2005.

After all, even former US president Jimmy Carter admitted he could not imagine Gush Etzion would ever be handed over to Palestinians.

Carter stunned the settler community which had long hated him for his opposition to settlements and whom they consider as pro-Palestinian, when he made the comment during a visit earlier this month to the bloc of settlements just south of Jerusalem.

"One can only wonder what President (Barack) Obama would feel if he actually saw for himself, rather than rely on hearsay," says Allan Novetsky as he watches his grandchildren, perched high up trees, picking cherries.

Novetsky, who moved to Jerusalem from Chicago three years ago, says he regularly takes family trips to Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

"We treat the country as a whole. We want to show presence throughout the country."

He points out he never feels the need to carry a weapon on such trips.

"It's as safe as any street in New York, probably safer," he says. A few metres (yards) away, two soldiers, assault rifles slung over their shoulders, amble through the orchard, stopping every now and then to eat some cherries.

Late last year, the Yesha Council, the main settlers' organisation, launched a major drive to attract tourism under the motto: "Judea and Samaria, the story of every Jew."

The campaign aims at promoting not only tourism in the West Bank -- which most Israelis refer to as Judea and Samaria -- but also the concept that Jews have had a God-given right to the land since Biblical times.

More than 280,000 Israelis live in some 120 settlements that criss-cross the West Bank and that are generally off-limits to Palestinians.

The international community considers the settlements illegal. Israel rejects this, and its right-wing government has dismissed calls for a freeze of all construction activity.

Authorities did demolish a few shacks in tiny outposts that were set up without authorisation, but right-wing activists immediately started rebuilding and pledged to erect more wildcat settlements.

The outposts have drawn much controversy but also hundreds of tourists, most of them intent on showing solidarity.

"The aim is to bring as many Jews as possible to the region, so they can see up close the type of danger that people face," says Tomer Tzanani, who runs outpost tours in an armoured bus twice a month.

Asked what Palestinians thought of the tours, Tzanani admitted: "I have no idea. We never come into contact with them."

Many settlers are convinced the Palestinians are the intruders in the West Bank, not the Jews.

The land of the Jews, says Bitane, "is not just this small bit they want to give us, but the whole of Greater Israel."

That he says includes the Golan Heights, which Israel seized from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War, when it also captured Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai peninsula

"We need the Golan. People need it to spend their vacations," says Bitane as loudspeakers blare out James Brown's signature tune "I feel good".

## **Bibi's inner circle**

**Article Author(s):** Leslie Susser

**Media Outlet:** Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA)

**Date:** June 29, 2009

**Source Link(s):** <http://jta.org/news/article/2009/06/29/1006203/bibis-inner-circle> <sup>[8]</sup>

Benjamin Netanyahu's father, the historian Ben Zion Netanyahu, once said that his son's biggest failure as a leader was his inability to pick the right people to advise him.

Now prime minister for a second time and facing major decisions on Iran, the Palestinians and the Arab world -- not to mention ties with the United States -- Netanyahu has picked what looks like a strong but possibly too like-minded team.

These are the more influential members of the inner circle Netanyahu has put together in the weeks since taking office.

\* Uzi Arad, National Security Council chief: Netanyahu's chief adviser on foreign policy during his first term from 1996 to 1999, and a close confidant ever since, Arad is the person whose advice the prime minister values most. A quick-tempered workaholic who has a doctorate in international relations, Arad joined Netanyahu's team after a long career in the Mossad, where he was director of research. He later became the founding director of the Lauder School of Government at the Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center.

Although he comes from a left-wing family, Arad is an ideological hawk who sees the neutralization of Iran's drive for nuclear weapons as Israel's top priority. He was highly critical of both the Bush invasion of Iraq and Ariel Sharon's disengagement from Gaza for diverting efforts and attention from the Iranian threat. Like Netanyahu, Arad believes Israel must receive cast-iron security guarantees before a Palestinian state can be established. Strongly security-minded, Arad also has been active in efforts to upgrade Israel's ties with NATO.

Arad was barred in June 2007 from entering the United States because of two meetings in February 2004 with Larry Franklin, a Pentagon analyst who later pleaded guilty to transferring classified material on Iran to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. During a visit to Jerusalem in April, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton hinted that she did not want him in a meeting, but Arad stayed. Since then, the

U.S. ban on Arad has been quietly lifted.

\* Ron Dermer, adviser: Formerly the chief economic officer at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, Dermer is another highly influential foreign policy hawk. For more than a decade he has been close to Netanyahu and newly elected Jewish Agency Chairman Natan Sharansky, and with Sharansky he co-authored the best-seller "The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror." Born and raised in Miami Beach, Fla., where his brother David is mayor, Dermer comes from a Republican family with close ties to Florida's ex-governor, Jeb Bush.

Returning from Netanyahu's meeting with President Obama in mid-May, Dermer controversially told journalists on the plane that "the idea of two states for two peoples is a stupid and childish solution to a very complex problem." Under pressure, he clarified his position.

"When I say childish, I mean the media's obsession with the two-state plan, the fixation on that idea rather than focusing on the fundamental issues," he said. "I don't think two states for two peoples is a childish approach."

\* Yitzhak Molcho, attorney: A longstanding friend and trusted emissary for special or sensitive negotiating missions, Molcho has picked up where he left off after Netanyahu's first term. Early in that term, in Gaza on June 27, 1996, Molcho and foreign policy adviser Dore Gold were the first Netanyahu people to meet PLO leader Yassir Arafat. Molcho went on to play a leading role in subsequent negotiations with the Palestinians.

Now he has been tasked with helping to frame new understandings with the Obama administration on building restrictions in West Bank settlements. Molcho was part of an Israeli team that met U.S. special Middle East envoy George Mitchell in London in late May, and a month later he was sent to Washington to pave the way for what was to have been a decisive meeting between Mitchell and Netanyahu in Paris, but failed to find enough common ground.

\* Dore Gold and Zalman Shoval, influential outside foreign policy advisers: Gold, a former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, has been close to Netanyahu for years and accompanied him to two meetings with Obama, when both the U.S. president and the Israeli prime minister had yet to be elected. Shoval, a former ambassador to Washington, is a key member of the Likud Party's foreign policy team and was in Washington this week holding high-level meetings on the settlements issue.

\* Nir Hefetz, chief media coordinator: Hefetz, a seasoned journalist and former editor of the Yediot Achronot weekend supplement Seven Days, was drafted hurriedly in mid-June to restore order after complaints of mixed messages emanating from the Prime Minister's Office. Hefetz is the co-author with Gadi Blum of a monumental 2005 biography of Sharon and the more recent "Whither Israel: 18 Conversations with People who are Shaping the Country."

\* Omer Moav and Uri Yogev are key economic advisers, both from the school of small government.

\* Eyal Gabai, director general of the Prime Minister's Office: Another believer in small government, Gabai as the director of the Government Companies' Authority oversaw the privatization of a number of big companies, including the Bezeq phone company, El Al Airlines, Zim Shipping and Israel Railways. Gabai has a reputation for defining targets clearly and getting things done.

\* Natan Eshel, bureau chief: A former CEO of the National Religious Party newspaper Hatzofe and deputy CEO of billionaire Sheldon Adelson's pro-Netanyahu newspaper Yisrael Hayom, Eshel sees himself as a

civil servant responsible for the smooth running of the prime minister's daily schedule.

## PA: Hamas plotted attacks on West Bank officials

**Media Outlet:** Ma'an News Agency

**Date:** June 29, 2009

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.maannews.net/en/index.php?opr=ShowDetails&ID=38903> <sup>[9]</sup>

Hamas members planned attacks on Palestinian Authority (PA) officials in the West Bank on orders from Hamas leaders abroad and the group's armed wing in Gaza, a senior official said on Monday.

At-Tayib Abdul Rahim, secretary-general of the Palestinian Presidency revealed the alleged plot at a news conference in Ramallah. He said the PA learned of the plans from interrogations of Hamas prisoners.

He said that a Hamas cell had planned the attack ahead of the 7 June deadline set by Egypt for an agreement between Hamas and Fatah.

Hamas has not yet responded to these charges.

"We learned that some Hamas affiliates were told to prepare to distribute sweets on 1 July at 2:00pm after attacks are completed," Abdul Rahim asserted.

He said however that the security situation was under control and that all those who prepared to undertake attacks against PA officials would be arrested.

"These directives, and these intended attacks are aimed only at thwarting dialogue on 7 July, and that indicates Hamas is not ready to sign agreement in Cairo," Abdul Rahim added. He threatened to reveal the details of these Hamas plans to the public if that would be a necessity.

Abdul Rahim also said that concerned Arab states' leaders had been updated on the details of the newly revealed Hamas plots.

The Palestinian presidency secretary-general reiterated that Hamas security forces in the Gaza Strip had detained about 100 Fatah affiliates including members of the movement's Revolutionary Council as well as regional leaders. He also mentioned that Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas gave directives to release 100 Hamas-affiliated detainees in the West Bank.

## Israel and US hold settlement discussions

**Article Author(s):** Vita Bekker

**Media Outlet:** The National

**Date:** June 30, 2009

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.thenational.ae/article/20090630/FOREIGN/706299838/1002> <sup>[10]</sup>

Ehud Barak, Israel's defence minister, will meet with George Mitchell, the top US Middle East envoy, in

New York today for talks aimed at bridging a growing rift between the two countries on the expansion of Jewish settlements in occupied territory that Palestinians want as part of their future state.

The discussion between Mr Barak and Mr Mitchell takes place less than a week after the last-minute cancellation of a meeting between the US emissary and Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, amid media speculation that both sides needed more time to work out a compromise on the settlement issue.

The differences may deepen, however, after Israel's defence ministry announced just hours before Mr Barak departed for the US yesterday that it had given the go-ahead for the building of 50 new homes in the West Bank.

The houses are meant for some 200 settlers who are being moved from a small outpost that has not been authorised by the Israeli government to Adam, a 25-year-old community of 3,500 settlers located north of Jerusalem.

The units are part of a plan to eventually build 1,450 houses in Adam, most of which have not yet obtained final approval, the ministry said.

Officials in the Palestinian Authority, which refuses to restart negotiations with Israel's new government until settlement expansion ceases, blasted the new construction as destructive to the peace process.

Since Mr Netanyahu took power in late March, tensions with Washington have escalated as Israel rejected the US demand to employ a total freeze on the construction of Jewish settlements in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Furthermore, pressure on Israel is increasing after Mr Netanyahu encountered similar calls last week from Nicolas Sarkozy, the French president, and Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian prime minister, during his first official visit to Europe since taking office, as well as from G8 foreign ministers who met in Italy on Friday.

As a compromise during today's talks, Mr Barak may propose temporarily halting all new building projects or limiting them to high-rise construction, Israeli media reported yesterday.

The Israeli defence minister has indicated a temporary freeze will not be ruled out.

When asked to comment on a report on Sunday in Yediot Ahronot, Israel's most popular newspaper, that he plans to suggest a three-month moratorium on beginning new settlement construction, while work on some 2,000 structures in late-stage building continues, he said: "The matter mentioned in the headlines has not been finalised.

"The issue of the settlements, as part of a broad range of issues, is part of our dialogue with the Americans."

Mr Barak appeared to have been tapped for the sensitive task of narrowing the gap with Israel's most powerful ally because the defence minister is viewed as more moderate because of his role as the head of the Labor party, the only centrist member of the predominantly right-wing government.

The Labor party has long supported Palestinian statehood and significant withdrawals from occupied Palestinian territory – which most of the current governing coalition partners oppose – yet it has also backed continued settlement construction.

Commentators said the US may offer to make a settlement freeze more politically palatable for Mr

Netanyahu by suggesting vaguer wording be publicly used to describe such a construction halt and by repeating demands for the Palestinians to take actions such as reining in militants.

Today's meeting is also likely to address the US's long-standing demand that Israel dismantle so-called wildcat outposts that have been built without formal government approval – yet typically with the tacit backing of its ministries – as a first step to a rollback of settlement expansion.

For years, Israel has pledged to remove such outposts, many of them little more than a cluster of mobile homes, but so far little has been done, and most of the few that have been taken apart were quickly rebuilt by settlers.

Mr Netanyahu, according to analysts, may have little choice but to mend the rift with Washington.

“The Israeli public will severely punish Netanyahu if he alienates the White House,” said Yaron Ezrahi, a liberal political scientist at Jerusalem's Hebrew University. “To Israelis, America is absolutely vital for Israel strategically and politically.”

Mr Ezrahi said the pressure on Mr Netanyahu may also mount if ongoing reconciliation talks succeed between Fatah, the western-backed movement that holds sway in the West Bank, and Hamas, the Islamist group that rules the Gaza Strip.

He added: “An agreement between the factions will increase the extent to which Israel can no longer resist that pressure, because conflict among the Palestinians has been Netanyahu's strongest argument against responding to the demands by the White House.”

## Editorial: The Gaza ghetto

**Media Outlet:** Arab News

**Article Type:** Editorial

**Date:** June 30, 2009

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=124162&d=30&m=6&y=2009> <sup>[11]</sup>

THE report on life in Gaza just issued by the International Committee of the Red Cross six months after the brutal Israeli attacks which killed between 1,100 and 1,400 people makes bitter reading.

According to the ICRC, there has been almost no improvement since the Israelis stopped their brutal onslaught. The daily round of killing may have stopped but Gazans are still condemned to living in a war zone. It remains a bombsite. Even if they had the money to rebuild their shattered homes and lives, they cannot get hold of the equipment. The reopening of the Rafah checkpoint on the border with Egypt has slightly improved matters – some trucks with medical aid have got through but it is a tiny fraction of what is needed. Israel's blockade of the strip remains devastatingly effective. Gaza is, as the ICRC report so horrifyingly points out, a state of despair. Imprisoned by the Israelis, still mourning the deaths of family and friends (there is hardly a family that did not lose someone), with woefully insufficient medical care, a destroyed economy, no hope of a job and living in what looks like an earthquake zone (the reports' own words), there is a hopelessness that shocks.

A state of despair... facing, on the other side of the prison wires, a state of arrogance. For over 60 years

now, the Israelis have treated the Palestinians with contempt and hatred. Time after time, the latter's human rights are trampled over, their political aspirations crushed, UN resolutions ignored, international outrage scorned and efforts to mediate peace spurned.

It is not merely a state of arrogance, it is a state of insanity. The despair sown by the Israelis in Gaza breeds militancy and hatred. It breeds, too, a counter arrogance which displays itself in a refusal to countenance Palestinian-Israeli cohabitation, indeed to countenance anything other than Israel's complete destruction.

The Israelis blockade Gaza to punish the Palestinians for electing Hamas and to force its supporters from firing rockets at Israeli towns and settlement; it does the exact opposite. It fuels hatred of Israel. It ensures the rockets continue. It pushes the Gazans into the rejectionists' embrace and creates a breeding ground for a fresh generations of suicide bombers. Only a lunatic would claim that it is in Israel's interests. The cycle of oppression and misery has to be broken if Israel is to have the security it claims it wants. As a first step, it has to lift the restrictions and allow Gaza to start working and living again. Israel can never live in peace while it grinds the Gazans into the dust, while it keeps the territory as one giant prison whose inmates are forced to live in misery and squalor and humiliated daily. Nor should it.

The only way forward is the two-state solution proposed by the then Crown Prince and now Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah and adopted by Arab states in 2002 and again revived at the Riyadh summit two years ago in which, in exchange for Israel's withdrawal from all lands occupied in 1967, Arab states would recognize it. The whole world understands that, including the US; only the Israeli government balks at the idea and consistently finds reasons to block it ? which calls into question its claims it wants peace. It seems far more interested in wanting mastery ? brutal mastery if necessary ? over the Palestinians.

Gaza seems proof of that.

## Israel ministers divided on settlement halt

**Article Author(s):** Barak Ravid

**Media Outlet:** Haaretz

**Date:** June 30, 2009

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1096642.html> <sup>[12]</sup>

Defense Minister Ehud Barak will meet in New York today with U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East George Mitchell in an effort to agree on a compromise formula on settlement construction. The meeting takes place in light of a recent disagreement among the "forum of six" ministers over this issue.

A political source in Jerusalem said Monday that a "temporary freeze" of construction in the settlements was met with objections by three of the six senior ministers in the forum.

Monday morning the forum, which includes Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and ministers Dan Meridor, Benny Begin and Moshe Ya'alon, met to agree on a position that Barak would then present to Mitchell.

Barak supported a formula according to which Israel would freeze settlement construction completely,

except for projects that have already started, and would require U.S. guarantees on the future of the peace process.

A political source in Jerusalem said that Barak's position was countered by Lieberman, Begin and Ya'alon, who opposed his proposal. The three argued that "a temporary freeze" of settlement construction will create a precedent and may become permanent. "If we start it will be difficult to go back," the three said.

It is unclear what the positions of Netanyahu and Meridor were.

According to the three ministers opposing Barak, Israel must not propose a "temporary freeze" without a commitment for similar and equal concessions by Arab states and the Palestinian Authority, and as part of a broader package deal. Another argument put forth was that Israel must request guarantees from the U.S., so that it is not surprised by American initiatives without earlier consultation.

"We must explain to the Americans that we, too, have red lines," Deputy Prime Minister Ya'alon said during the meeting.

Nonetheless, Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon said Monday that "Israel and the U.S. will not enter a confrontation over the settlements. The shared interests are too strong and the joint aim is to work together and avoid a dead end."

During the meeting with Mitchell, Barak intends to present a more watered-down proposal, which will include a declared wish to resolve the settlements issue during negotiations with the Palestinian Authority over a final settlement agreement. Moreover, the proposal will be to limit new construction to the addition of stories to existing structures in the settlements, except for projects that have already begun.

Netanyahu has dispatched his special adviser, Isaac Molho, to the meeting between Barak and Mitchell. Molho met Mitchell last week but the formula he presented to the U.S. envoy was rejected. The failure of that meeting resulted in the cancelation of a planned meeting between the prime minister and Mitchell in Paris last week.

Prior to his departure Monday, Barak said that "the intimate and direct dialogue with the U.S. continues, and its purpose is to advance regional order. Within this framework it is possible to have effective and practical negotiations with the Palestinians, and within this framework it is also possible to find an appropriate solution to the issue of settlement construction."

## **Fatah deputy reports progress in unity talks with Hamas**

**Article Author(s):** Avi Issacharoff

**Media Outlet:** Haaretz

**Date:** June 30, 2009

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1096744.html> <sup>[13]</sup>

The head of the Fatah faction in the Palestinian parliament, Azzam al-Ahmed, said on Tuesday that significant progress has been made in Egyptian-mediated reconciliation talks with Hamas.

The Fatah deputy said that both sides have found common ground on key issues, including Hamas prisoners being held in Palestinian Authority prisons, Palestinian elections, as well as the make-up of the

armed force that is likely to be deployed in the Gaza Strip.

Both sides are currently discussing a deal whereby 75 percent of parliament members would be elected via party lists while the remaining 25 percent would be subject to regional polls.

Hamas and Fatah are also believed to be in agreement that the Gaza force would number 3,000 armed personnel. In addition, both the Fatah-run governments in the West Bank and the Hamas regime in Gaza would continue to rule while a joint committee is formed to administer the rehabilitation of the Strip and preparations for elections.

Israel opposes Egypt's proposal of a Palestinian unity government because it allows Hamas to be part of the Palestinian leadership.

Israel is holding talks with Egypt on a new cease-fire agreement in Gaza - the negotiations revolve around an Egyptian proposal within a broader effort to reconcile the two main Palestinian factions, Fatah and Hamas.

Another plank in the broader agreement being discussed is the reopening of the crossings to the Gaza Strip, on the border with Sinai and Israel.

## Lieberman ally slams Netanyahu over Sarkozy remarks

**Media Outlet:** Haaretz

**Date:** June 30, 2009

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1096504.html> <sup>[14]</sup>

French President Nicolas Sarkozy's unusually blunt call on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to remove Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman from his post has sparked a political backlash among Lieberman's allies in Jerusalem.

During the premier's visit to Paris last week, Sarkozy urged Netanyahu to "get rid" of hard-line Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, Channel Two reported on Monday.

The second-in-command of Lieberman's Yisrael Beteinu party said Netanyahu should have "banged on the table" in response to Sarkozy's attack on Lieberman.

"It is hard to believe that the leader of a friendly country would express himself in such a way," Infrastructure Minister Uzi Landau told Army Radio on Tuesday.

"If I was the prime minister, and those statements were made in my presence, I would have banged on the table and protested," Landau told Army Radio. "That is how a prime minister who preserves his country's dignity should behave."

The Foreign Ministry responded to the report by lambasting the French leader for his "intolerable intervention in internal Israeli affairs."

Sarkozy spent a good portion of his meeting with Netanyahu last Wednesday discussing the composition of the Israeli official, according to the report. The presence of three other Israeli officials at the meeting did

not deter the French leader from expressing his true opinion of the foreign minister, said Channel Two.

The French president reportedly told Netanyahu that while he usually scheduled talks with Israel's top foreign envoys on visit to Paris he could not bring himself to meet with Lieberman. According to Channel Two, this statement was accompanied by disparaging hand gestures.

Sarkozy then advised Netanyahu to fire Lieberman and bring former foreign minister Tzipi Livni back into the coalition, according to the report. Netanyahu reportedly told Sarkozy that Lieberman came across differently in private than his public appearances would suggest.

French far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen also comes across as a nice person in private, Sarkozy reportedly responded, to which Netanyahu replied that Lieberman was not Le Pen and that there was no basis for comparison. Sarkozy then responded that he did not intend to compare.

The prime minister's bureau did not respond to Sarkozy's remarks nor deny them, but the office of Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman did respond with a strong condemnation.

"If the words attributed to the president of France are correct, the interference of a president of a respected democratic state in the matters of another democratic state is a grave and intolerable thing. We expect that that regardless of political stance, every political body in Israel will condemn this callous attack by a foreign state in our domestic affairs."

Meanwhile MK Ahmed Tibi welcomed Sarkozy's comments, saying that he hopes "the international community has started to absorb the danger of the fascism" being taught by Lieberman.

## US 'optimistic' ahead of Barak-Mitchell meeting

**Article Author(s):** Yitzhak Benhorin

**Media Outlet:** Ynetnews

**Date:** June 30, 2009

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3738993,00.html> <sup>[15]</sup>

Will the Barak-Mitchell meeting manage to relieve some of the tension between Israel and the United States? The White House has expressed its optimism over the chances of making progress during Tuesday's meeting between Defense Minister Ehud Barak and special US envoy George Mitchell, which will be held in New York.

Barak was sent by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to meet with Mitchell in a bid to reach an understanding with the Obama administration about continuing construction in West Bank settlement for natural growth purposes.

White House Spokesman Robert Gibbs refused on Monday night to address reports that the Israeli government has decided to allow construction for natural growth needs, alongside the willingness to agree to a complete freeze for a period of several months.

"I don't want to get ahead of some very important meetings tomorrow between Ehud Barak and George Mitchell, except to say that we're optimistic about making progress," he said.

The US State Department is aware of the criticism, including on the part of commentators and column writers, who say that Israel is being demanded to freeze settlements while the Palestinians and Arabs are sitting on the fence and doing nothing.

Barak met with Mitchell in New York at the beginning of the month for a meeting which lasted more than three hours, most of it face-to-face. This time Barak is expected to arrive with some of his advisors and with Netanyahu's representative, Attorney Yitzhak Molcho.

Barak hopes to reach an understanding with the Obama administration representative about necessary construction for natural growth within existing settlements. However, the winds blowing from the State Department indicate that the administration will insist on a complete freeze of construction.

'Both sides know what this means'

State Department Spokesman Ian Kelly clarified Monday night that stopping settlements was defined very clearly in the Road Map for Peace. "A freeze on all activity relating to settlements, including natural growth, is what it says in the Road Map," he said.

Kelly explained, "We've been working with all the parties to try and come up with an environment conducive to the resumption of negotiations."

He added that "both Israel and the Palestinians need to comply with their obligations under the Road Map, and both sides know exactly what that means. For the Palestinians, it means ending incitements to violence against Israel and demonstrating an ability to provide security. For Israel, it means: Stop the settlements, which is laid out very specifically in the Road Map."

## **PA official: Hamas planned to assassinate senior officials**

**Article Author(s):** Ali Waked

**Media Outlet:** Ynetnews

**Date:** June 30, 2009

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3738956,00.html> <sup>[16]</sup>

The Palestinian Authority has recently arrested a Hamas cell that admitted to planning to assassinate senior Palestinian officials by July 7, the date set by Egypt for the signing of an agreement between Fatah and the Islamist group, the head of the Palestinian Presidency said on Monday.

According to Tayeb Abdul-Rahim, the order to attack Palestinian officials and institutions in the northern West Bank was given by Hamas' leadership abroad and by its armed wing in Gaza, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades.

He said the uncovering of the Hamas cell proves that the Islamist group is looking to undermine the reconciliation talks with Fatah. "The PA is certain that Hamas is not prepared to reach an agreement in Cairo. We will not let them carry out their secret plans," said Abdul-Rahim in reference to Hamas' leadership abroad.

"If necessary, we will reveal these files so the Palestinian public will know that Hamas' leadership is not interested in unity, but is rather interested in perpetuating the internal rift, which serves the (Israeli)

occupation," he said.

The secretary-general of the Palestinian Presidency said that no more than five Hamas operatives had been detained in connection with the assassination plot, adding that a number of Arab countries have been informed of the developments.

Senior Hamas figure Sami Abu Zuhri said in response that the PA's allegations were "ridiculous and false."

"The timing of these allegations is not coincidental and is aimed at justifying the position of Fatah, which does not want to close the case of the political detainees," he said.

Abu Zuhri said that among the Hamas men arrested are city council members, professors and imams.

## **Analysis: Diplomatic faux pas, or calculated message?**

**Article Author(s):** Yaakov Katz

**Media Outlet:** The Jerusalem Post

**Article Type:** Analysis

**Date:** June 29, 2009

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1246296531629&pagename=JPost%2FJPArti...>

[17]

Israel has a thing with timing, particularly around important diplomatic meetings.

In January, 2007, for example, then-prime minister Ehud Olmert flew down to Sharm el-Sheikh for a meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Shortly before Olmert's plane took off, the IDF launched a rare daytime raid on downtown Ramallah in search of a terror suspect. Pictures of the raid - in which four people were killed and 20 wounded - were broadcast live on Al Jazeera. Needless to say, this was not constructive for the Olmert-Mubarak meeting.

On Monday, timing was again not taken into consideration with the Defense Ministry revealing in a court affidavit it had approved the construction of 50 homes in the West Bank settlement of Adam under a master plan for the Binyamin Region that includes the construction of 1,450 housing units.

The affidavit was filed just hours before Defense Minister Ehud Barak left for New York to meet with the US Special Envoy to the Middle East George Mitchell to discuss America's demand that Israel stop exactly what the Defense Ministry affidavit was approving - continued settlement construction.

There are two possibilities regarding the bad timing in this case. One option is that the court had simply set the date for filing the affidavit without taking any external factors into account. However, one could ask why the Defense Ministry, which knew early last week about Barak's meeting with Mitchell, didn't just ask the court for an extension - something the ministry often does in similar cases.

The second possibility is that the filing of the affidavit as Barak left for the US was done on purpose to send a message to the Obama administration that Israel does not plan to cave in completely to America's demand for a settlement freeze. The construction in Adam is meant to pave the way for the evacuation of the illegal settlement of Migron, which is in itself just as important to the US - if not more so, since the outpost was built on private Palestinian land.

Barak, according to some officials, plans to offer the Americans a three month freeze on construction but will claim Israel needs to allow natural growth to continue, particularly in the settlement blocs.

So while Barak is limited in what he can propose to Mitchell regarding the settlements, he does have some maneuvering room on the issue of freedom of movement in the West Bank, the transfer of security over Palestinian towns to the Palestinian Authority and the evacuation of illegal outposts.

In their meeting, Barak will present Mitchell with a list of the gestures Israel has made to the PA over the past 18 months, including the removal of 21 manned roadblocks in the West Bank. A year-and-a-half ago, there were 35 manned checkpoints. Today, there are 14. The IDF has also removed over 100 dirt mounds that had been placed on roads in the West Bank, effectively blocking Palestinian traffic.

However, according to the Americans there is a lot more that can be done.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), there are still 68 manned checkpoints throughout the West Bank, and an additional 24 "partial checkpoints" which are staffed, according to the agency, on an ad-hoc basis. In addition the checkpoints, OCHA claims that there are 521 obstacles in the West Bank - such as earth mounds - that block off Palestinian access to West Bank roads.

What was unique about OCHA's report was that it was the product of a first-of-its-kind joint survey of the West Bank roadblock situation by the UN and the IDF. The joint tour of the West Bank roadblocks was initiated by Col. Benny Shik, the IDF Central Command's chief engineering officer, who is responsible for dismantling the checkpoints.

The explanation for the discrepancy between the OCHA and IDF numbers has to do with the way one defines a checkpoint. The 14 that the IDF says it maintains in the West Bank are deep inside the territory and could potentially impact Palestinian movement even though they are not manned on a full-time basis.

After removing the 21 roadblocks over the past 18 months, a Palestinian can now travel from Jenin to Hebron without passing even one roadblock or undergoing even one inspection. While some roadblocks remain in the territory, the IDF says they don't have a major impact on Palestinian freedom of movement. At the same time, OC Central Command Maj.-Gen. Gadi Shamni is considering lifting some of the remaining checkpoints.

OCHA, on the other hand, includes unmanned checkpoints in its count. In addition, the OCHA number includes the crossings into Israel, since some of them are located just over the Green Line. The IDF does not count these since they are manned by the Border Police and do not impact Palestinian freedom of movement. There is also the question of OCHA's political motivations and whether its reports are objective. Israel doesn't think they are.

The motivation of both sides for conducting the joint tour, though, is clear. The IDF has an interest in getting the word out about the roadblocks it has lifted. At the same time, OCHA has the opportunity to obtain its information from the source, which is in this case the IDF.

## **Poll: 'Palestinian support for Hamas waning'**

**Media Outlet:** The Jerusalem Post

**Date:** June 29, 2009

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1245924958272&pagename=JPost%2FJPAr...>

[18]

Hamas support among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza is waning, according to a survey conducted by the Palestinian Jerusalem Media and Communications Center (JMCC).

According to the results of the poll published Monday, 18.8 percent of the Palestinian population backs the Islamist group, compared to 27% when the last JMCC survey was conducted in January.

The survey of 1,199 people also showed that 35% of Palestinians support Fatah, a nine percent rise compared with the previous survey.

In addition, 26.5% said they blamed Israel for the lack of a breakthrough in Fatah-Hamas reconciliation talks, while 23% said Hamas was responsible and 15% blamed Fatah.

Khader Khader, head of the JMCC media unit, said Hamas's popularity was hit by disgruntlement among Gaza residents over a lack of a deal in Egyptian-mediated reconciliation talks and the continued blockade of the territory.

"It's a sort of protest by the people (of Gaza) because there is no progress on these two major issues," Khader was quoted by Reuters as saying.

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