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Obama puts Israel on notice

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<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/commentaryanalysis/537774-obama-puts-israel-on-notice...> [1]

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Israel's "PR problem" is actually a reaction to its indefensible policies, and the US has just issued a blunt warning

Many Israelis and their friends are well aware they have an "image problem." But what far too many of them fail to appreciate is that their country's policies and conduct are primarily responsible for Israel's worsening reputation. What is perceived to be a PR problem is actually a "reality problem." And realities have consequences.

Many Israelis feel they are being singled out, particularly in a turbulent and oppressive Middle East, by unfair double standards. After all, they note, 130,000 people have been killed in Syria in the past three years. But this is a bubble of delusion. There's almost never been a society that wasn't able to point to another state with worse behavior, or at least as bad, to try to argue there is something unfair about the criticism they face. Apartheid-era South Africa pointed to a plethora of genuinely reprehensible and bloodthirsty African dictators to try to argue they looked mild in comparison. That didn't work then, and it won't work now.

Israel and its friends need to wake up. The rising tide of criticism against the country's policies isn't being driven by anti-Semitism, which is a fringe factor. And it's not a campaign of "delegitimization" either, because most of this growing criticism in mainstream Western discourse doesn't question the fundamental legitimacy of the Israeli state. The occupation that began in 1967 coupled with how Israel is conducting itself today as an occupying power is a reality that Israelis and many of their friends in the West are refusing to face.

Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics [has just reported](#) [2] that settlement construction, which is strictly

prohibited under international law (most notably the Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 49, paragraph 6), increased by an astonishing 123% during 2013 as opposed to the previous year. And there's every indication that settlement expansion is continuing to surge in 2014.

Settlement activity, for many Israelis, simply means building houses for Jews. But the reason it's banned by the Geneva Convention is that it is a human rights abuse against any civilian population living under foreign military occupation, who have a right not to be colonized.

Israelis seem genuinely surprised that a surge in international criticism, and a growing refusal in Europe to fund or cooperate with any Israeli activity in the occupied territories, should accompany this surge in settlement activity. But it was inevitable.

And it's not just the taking of land from Palestinians, or the fact that Israel rules over millions of disenfranchised non-citizens with no end in sight, or even the fact that Israelis and Palestinians living in the occupied territories operate under completely separate and extremely unequal systems of law, rights, and responsibilities.

Amnesty International has just issued [a new report](#) [3] accusing Israeli occupation forces of "a harrowing

pattern of unlawful killings and unwarranted injuries of Palestinian civilians by Israeli forces in the West Bank." The report says many of the killings appeared to be willful and unnecessary, and could very well constitute "war crimes."

Israel, of course, dismisses all this criticism. And many Israelis see it as at least grotesquely unfair if not downright anti-Semitic. But this is delusional. No state behaving like this, particularly one that is deeply intertwined with the West and the global system and marketplace, can or should expect to be immune from criticism and consequences.

And so Israelis and their friends should take careful note of what US President Barack Obama told Jeffrey

Goldberg [in an interview](#) [4] timed perfectly to coincide with this year's annual AIPAC convention. Obama

pledged the United States would staunchly support Israel, but bluntly warned, "If Palestinians come to believe that the possibility of a contiguous sovereign Palestinian state is no longer within reach, then our ability to manage the international fallout is going to be limited."

Indeed, it's unlikely that Europeans would be pursuing their *de facto* settlement boycott campaign if they felt the United States either planned to, or was capable of, restraining them. So it's not just a question of the American "ability" to protect Israel from the consequences of indefensible policies that are so damaging to

the prospects of the two-state solution. There is even a question about the American will to do so.

What Obama, and many other friends of Israel including prominent Jewish Americans, are trying to tell Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli society is that they don't have an "image problem." They have a reality problem. Israel's occupation, and its policies toward the Palestinians, are realities that cannot be defended internationally.

If Israel wants to continue to entrench the occupation, expand settlements, and oppress the disenfranchised Palestinians while pretending that it really isn't a big deal or a priority, or that the status quo is sustainable, no one can stop them. But, Obama and others are bluntly saying, no one can save them from the consequences either.

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