

It's a new world, Bibi By Daniel Gordis The Jerusalem Post July 2, 2009

I wouldn't be surprised if Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu were thinking of Tevye these days. Tevye was, after all, a quasi-pathetic character simply trying to make sense of a world changing far more quickly than he might have ever imagined possible. Having granted his daughter, Hodel, permission to marry Perchik the pauper, he wonders, "What am I going to tell your mother?" He didn't choose Perchik, and he doesn't really approve. But he is powerless. And when his wife expresses her dismay, the best explanation he can offer is "It's a new world, Golde."

"It's a new world, Golde" is not a claim that Perchik is the right man for Hodel. Or that he'll ever make a real living. It's simply a claim that the rules have changed. And in a world with new rules, people must learn to act and respond differently. Tevye never says that, of course. But he is simple, not stupid; and he intuitively understands that he is going to have to learn to navigate his world in an entirely different way.

Tevye is a not entirely inapt metaphor for Israel. We're living in world operating according to rules that we're just beginning to understand. Convinced of the legitimacy of at least much of our position, for years we ignored the warning signs that the world was turning on us, that it has grown tired of the conflict in the Middle East, and that it believes we are the reason the conflict will not subside.

The world didn't change overnight. We simply weren't watching.

Now there is no more denying the new ground rules. Barack Obama is not really changing them. Perhaps he is shifting America's position, perhaps not. But more than anything, he is simply articulating infinitely more clearly than anyone else has what it is that the world has come to believe. And we are going to have to learn to operate not in the world we wish existed, but in the world that does exist. And in this new world, Israel is going to be held to standards that are infinitely less tolerant than the standards to which the rest of the world is accountable.

Consider, after all, events of just the past few weeks. In the aftermath of the Iranian election, much of the world watched with admiration and hope as Iranians took to the streets to insist on their (supposed) democratic rights. When the Iranian government resorted to intimidation, silencing of the press, force and then murder, the world was horrified - but it was also quiet. Where were the

mass rallies across Europe and on those North American campuses where students were still to be found calling for Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to back down? Where were the heads of state clamoring to get in front of television cameras calling for a new election? To be sure, the world was unhappy, but this was hardly an outpouring of support or of condemnation.

Compare that to the world's reaction to the Gaza operation half a year ago. To be sure, the circumstances were entirely different. Iran's election is an internal matter, while the Gaza op was not. And other differences abound. But Israel was responding to eight years of shelling of its citizens in what is undisputedly its territory (unless one disputes the notion that any territory is legitimately ours - which, in fact, is exactly Hamas' position); nonetheless, even before the urban warfare began, the world was unanimous and vocal that the operation had to end.

An almost deadening silence in one instance. And deafening outcries of excessive force in the other. Welcome to the new world.

Or suppose that some number of Israeli Arab women decided that they were going to wear the burka as a means of intensifying their personal religious odyssey. And that in response to their decision, Netanyahu said, "In our country, we cannot accept that women be prisoners behind a screen, cut off from all social life, deprived of all identity," or that "the burka is not a religious sign, it's a sign of subservience, a sign of debasement - I want to say it solemnly, it will not be welcome on the territory of the State of Israel." One can just imagine the world's outcry, the accusations of religious oppression, comparisons with apartheid South Africa or, yes, Nazi Germany. But substitute "the Republic of France" for State of Israel, and you have precisely French President Nicolas Sarkozy's words this week - again, to a relatively silent international community of listeners.

Or finally, recall Obama's twisting in the wind as he came to realize that his outstretched hand to Iran was not going to be shaken as warmly as he'd allowed himself to imagine. Eventually, he gave in to enormous pressure to criticize the Iranian regime's repressive measures. But his criticism was tepid - he couldn't get over his fundamental sense that the world ought not meddle in Iran's internal affairs. A few days later, however, the press reported that Sarkozy had told Netanyahu that it was time to

dump Avigdor Lieberman and restore Tzipi Livni. Sarkozy's advice, apparently, is considered moving peace forward. Obama's suggesting that Iran recount the vote would be meddling.

There's no point railing against a double standard that no one is even inclined to deny. Right or wrong, for better or for worse, we need to adapt. Israel is going to have to learn to get ahead of the curve. Had Netanyahu's speech at Bar-Ilan University, by most accounts a very good speech, preceded Obama's Cairo address, Israel would have been throwing down the gauntlet, challenging the Palestinians to recognize the Jewish state and to live in peace beside it. But coming when they did, Netanyahu's remarks were essentially seen as caving in to Obama - too little, too late. That's what has to change.

End the Spat With Israel

By Jackson Diehl [The Washington Post](#)

The upheaval in Iran offers the Obama administration a host of fresh foreign policy opportunities. Not the least of them is a chance to creep away from the corner into which it has painted itself in the Arab-Israeli peace process.

President Obama began with a broad strategy of simultaneously pressing Israel, the Palestinians and Arab states to take concrete steps toward peace. By the time Iranians took to the streets, it had allowed that broad front to be narrowed to a single point: a standoff with the Israeli government of Binyamin Netanyahu over whether "natural growth" would be allowed in Jewish settlements outside Israel's 1967 borders.

Pressuring Israel made sense, at first. The administration correctly understood that Netanyahu, a right-winger who took office with the clear intention of indefinitely postponing any Israeli-Palestinian settlement, needed to feel some public heat from Washington to change his position -- and that the show of muscle would add credibility to the administration's demands that Arab leaders offer their own gestures. But, starting with a statement by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in May, the administration made the mistake of insisting that an Israeli settlement "freeze" -- a term the past three administrations agreed to define loosely -- must mean a total stop to all construction in the West Bank and even East Jerusalem.

This absolutist position is a loser for three reasons. First, it has allowed Palestinian and Arab leaders to withhold the steps they were asked for; they claim to be waiting for the settlement "freeze" even as they quietly savor a rare public battle between Israel and the United States. Second, the administration's objective -- whatever its merits -- is unobtainable. No Israeli government has ever agreed

In this new world, the spotlight will almost always be on Israel. Settlement building. Roadblocks. Lieberman. We're going to have to learn to alter that. Make some accommodations, but demand - clearly and unequivocally - that the Palestinians do the same. Netanyahu, or whoever follows him, is going to have to learn to keep the ball, and the world's attention, squarely in and on their court. Like it or not, Israel needs to take the initiative, time and time again - because nothing else will work.

"It's a new world, Bibi," Tevye would have said. We don't have to like it. And it may not be fair, or just. But as we are wont to say, "*zeh mah yesh*" - it is what it is. As Tevye understood, we can either adapt, exerting at least some control over our fates, or we can wistfully long for days when other rules prevailed, even as we get swept away by currents we've barely begun to comprehend.

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to an unconditional freeze, and no coalition could be assembled from the current parliament to impose one.

Finally, the extraction of a freeze from Netanyahu is, as a practical matter, unnecessary. While further settlement expansion needs to be curbed, both the Palestinian Authority and Arab governments have gone along with previous U.S.-Israeli deals by which construction was to be limited to inside the periphery of settlements near Israel -- since everyone knows those areas will be annexed to Israel in a final settlement. Before the 2007 Annapolis peace conference organized by the Bush administration, Saudi Arabia and other Arab participants agreed to what one former senior official called "the Google Earth test"; if the settlements did not visibly expand, that was good enough.

Netanyahu, whose poor relations with Washington contributed to his ouster from office during a previous stint as prime minister, has been relatively quick to come around. In recent weeks he has delivered a speech in which he agreed for the first time to Palestinian statehood. In the West Bank Israel is removing military roadblocks, turning four more towns over to Palestinian security forces and taking the first steps to remove settlements it deems illegal. Meanwhile, government envoys -- led by Defense Minister Ehud Barak, who will be in Washington today -- have been offering various compromise formulas.

Curiously, though, the administration -- led by the State Department -- keeps raising the stakes. Clinton went out of her way on June 17 to disavow any agreements between the second Bush administration and Israel over "natural growth" in some settlements. In a press briefing last Monday,

State Department spokesman Ian Kelly responded to a question by saying the administration opposed new construction in all areas "across the [green] line" in Jerusalem -- a definition that would prohibit Israeli building in such areas as the Jewish Quarter of the Old City.

The result of such posturing is that the administration now faces a choice between a protracted confrontation with Israel -- an odd adventure given the pressing challenges from Iran and in Iraq, not to mention the disarray of the Palestinian camp -- or a compromise, which might make Obama look weak and provide Arab states further cause to refuse cooperation. The White House, I'm told, still hopes Netanyahu will accept a construction moratorium, with a time limit and perhaps a waiver for some buildings under

construction. But at this point some damage is probably unavoidable: If Barak and Middle East envoy George J. Mitchell agree on any formula short of that spelled out by Clinton and her spokesman, Arab media will trumpet it as an Obama cave-in.

The best course nevertheless lies in striking a quick deal with the left-leaning Barak this week under cover of the tumult in Tehran. The administration could then return to doing what it intended to do all along: press Palestinians as well as Israelis, friendly Arab governments and not-so-friendly Iranian clients such as Syria to take tangible steps toward a regional settlement. Such movement would be the perfect complement to the cause of change in Iran; how foolish it would be to squander it over a handful of Israeli apartment houses.

Hillary is Wrong About the Settlements

By Elliott Abrams The Wall Street Journal June 25, 2009

The U.S. and Israel reached a clear understanding about natural growth. Despite fervent denials by Obama administration officials, there were indeed agreements between Israel and the United States regarding the growth of Israeli settlements on the West Bank. As the Obama administration has made the settlements issue a major bone of contention between Israel and the U.S., it is necessary that we review the recent history.

In the spring of 2003, U.S. officials (including me) held wide-ranging discussions with then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in Jerusalem. The "Roadmap for Peace" between Israel and the Palestinians had been written. President George W. Bush had endorsed Palestinian statehood, but only if the Palestinians eliminated terror. He had broken with Yasser Arafat, but Arafat still ruled in the Palestinian territories. Israel had defeated the intifada, so what was next? Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, President George W. Bush, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Jordan's King Abdullah, June 4, 2003.

We asked Mr. Sharon about freezing the West Bank settlements. I recall him asking, by way of reply, what did that mean for the settlers? They live there, he said, they serve in elite army units, and they marry. Should he tell them to have no more children, or move?

We discussed some approaches: Could he agree there would be no additional settlements? New construction only inside settlements, without expanding them physically? Could he agree there would be no additional land taken for settlements?

As we talked several principles emerged. The father of the settlements now agreed that limits must be placed on the settlements; more fundamentally, the old foe of the Palestinians could -- under certain conditions -- now agree to Palestinian statehood.

In June 2003, Mr. Sharon stood alongside Mr. Bush, King Abdullah II of Jordan, and Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas at Aqaba, Jordan, and endorsed Palestinian statehood publicly: "It is in Israel's interest not to govern the Palestinians but for the Palestinians to govern themselves in their own state. A democratic Palestinian state fully at peace with Israel will promote the long-term security and well-being of Israel as a Jewish state." At the end of that year he announced his intention to pull out of the Gaza Strip.

The U.S. government supported all this, but asked Mr. Sharon for two more things. First, that he remove some West Bank settlements; we wanted Israel to show that removing them was not impossible. Second, we wanted him to pull out of Gaza totally -- including every single settlement and the "Philadelphi Strip" separating Gaza from Egypt, even though holding on to this strip would have prevented the smuggling of weapons to Hamas that was feared and has now come to pass. Mr. Sharon agreed on both counts.

These decisions were political dynamite, as Mr. Sharon had long predicted to us. In May 2004, his Likud Party rejected his plan in a referendum, handing him a resounding political defeat. In June, the Cabinet approved the withdrawal from Gaza, but only after Mr. Sharon fired two ministers and allowed two others to resign. His majority in the Knesset was now shaky.

After completing the Gaza withdrawal in August 2005, he called in November for a dissolution of the Knesset and for early elections. He also said he would leave Likud to form a new centrist party. The political and personal strain was very great. Four weeks later he suffered the first of two strokes that have left him in a coma.

Throughout, the Bush administration gave Mr. Sharon full support for his actions against terror and on final status issues. On April 14, 2004, Mr. Bush handed Mr. Sharon a letter saying that there would be no "right of return" for Palestinian refugees. Instead, the president said, "a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue as part of any final status agreement will need to be found through the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the settling of Palestinian refugees there, rather than in Israel."

On the major settlement blocs, Mr. Bush said, "In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli populations centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949." Several previous administrations had declared all Israeli settlements beyond the "1967 borders" to be illegal. Here Mr. Bush dropped such language, referring to the 1967 borders -- correctly -- as merely the lines where the fighting stopped in 1949, and saying that in any realistic peace agreement Israel would be able to negotiate keeping those major settlements.

On settlements we also agreed on principles that would permit some continuing growth. Mr. Sharon stated these clearly in a major policy speech in December 2003: "Israel will meet all its obligations with regard to construction in the settlements. There will be no construction beyond the existing construction line, no expropriation of land for construction, no special economic incentives and no construction of new settlements."

Ariel Sharon did not invent those four principles. They emerged from discussions with American officials and were discussed by Messrs. Sharon and Bush at their Aqaba meeting in June 2003.

They were not secret, either. Four days after the president's letter, Mr. Sharon's Chief of Staff Dov Weissglas wrote to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that "I wish to reconfirm the following understanding, which had been reached between us: 1. Restrictions on settlement growth: within the agreed principles of settlement activities, an effort will be made in the next few days to have a better definition of the construction line of settlements in Judea & Samaria."

Stories in the press also made it clear that there were indeed "agreed principles." On Aug. 21, 2004 the New York Times reported that "the Bush administration ... now supports construction of new apartments in areas already built up in some settlements, as long as the expansion does not extend outward."

In recent weeks, American officials have denied that any agreement on settlements existed. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated on June 17 that "in looking at the history of the Bush administration,

there were no informal or oral enforceable agreements. That has been verified by the official record of the administration and by the personnel in the positions of responsibility."

These statements are incorrect. Not only were there agreements, but the prime minister of Israel relied on them in undertaking a wrenching political reorientation -- the dissolution of his government, the removal of every single Israeli citizen, settlement and military position in Gaza, and the removal of four small settlements in the West Bank. This was the first time Israel had ever removed settlements outside the context of a peace treaty, and it was a major step.

It is true that there was no U.S.-Israel "memorandum of understanding," which is presumably what Mrs. Clinton means when she suggests that the "official record of the administration" contains none. But she would do well to consult documents like the Weissglas letter, or the notes of the Aqaba meeting, before suggesting that there was no meeting of the minds.

Mrs. Clinton also said there were no "enforceable" agreements. This is a strange phrase. How exactly would Israel enforce any agreement against an American decision to renege on it? Take it to the International Court in The Hague?

Regardless of what Mrs. Clinton has said, there was a bargained-for exchange. Mr. Sharon was determined to break the deadlock, withdraw from Gaza, remove settlements -- and confront his former allies on Israel's right by abandoning the "Greater Israel" position to endorse Palestinian statehood and limits on settlement growth. He asked for our support and got it, including the agreement that we would not demand a total settlement freeze.

For reasons that remain unclear, the Obama administration has decided to abandon the understandings about settlements reached by the previous administration with the Israeli government. We may be abandoning the deal now, but we cannot rewrite history and make believe it did not exist.

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Avoiding Obama's ambush

By Caroline B. Glick WorldJewishReview.com July 7, 2009

It works out that US President Barack Obama is a man of heartfelt, long-held principles. It also works out that his principles are divorced from reality and unresponsive to any facts that contradict them.

This much was made clear by a New York Times report on Sunday which discussed a recently "rediscovered" 1983 article Obama published in a student magazine on the subject of nuclear disarmament when he was an undergraduate at Columbia University.

Obama's article, "Breaking the war mentality," was ostensibly a feature story showcasing two student organizations that advocated a freeze in the US's nuclear arsenal. But the young Obama didn't hesitate to use his platform to make his own, even more radical views known to his readers. As he put it: "The narrow focus of the Freeze movement, as well as academic discussion of first- versus second-strike capabilities, suit the military-industrial interests, as they continue adding to their billion-dollar erector sets."

Citing a Rastafarian reggae musician as his foreign policy authority, Obama ruminated, "When Peter Tosh sings that 'everybody's asking for peace, but nobody's asking for justice,' one is forced to wonder whether disarmament or arms control issues, severed from economic and political issues, might be another instance of focusing on the symptoms of a problem, instead of the disease itself."

As one of the freeze advocates explained gently, contending with "the disease itself" was an unachievable goal since "you're not going to get rid of the military in the near future."

There is nothing shocking about Obama's embrace of radical politics as a college student. Particularly at Columbia, adopting such positions was the most conformist move a student could make. What is disturbing is that these views have endured over time, although they were overtaken by events 20 years ago.

Just six years after Obama penned his little manifesto, the Iron Curtain came crashing down. The Soviet empire fell not because radicals like Obama called for the US to destroy its nuclear arsenal, it fell because president Ronald Reagan ignored them and vastly expanded the US's nuclear arsenal while deploying short-range nuclear warheads in Europe and launching the US's missile defense program while renouncing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

On Monday Obama arrived in Moscow for a round of disarmament talks with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev. According to most accounts, while in Moscow Obama plans to abandon US allies Ukraine and Georgia and agree to deep cuts in US missile defense programs. In exchange, Moscow is

expected to consider joining Washington in cutting back on its nuclear arsenal just as the likes of Iran and North Korea build up theirs.

Of course, even if Russia doesn't agree to scale back its nuclear arsenal, Obama has already ensured that the US will slash the size of its own by refusing to fund its modernization. In short, Obama is working to implement the precise policy he laid out as an unoriginal student conformist 26 years ago.

By now of course, none of this is particularly surprising. Since entering office seven long months ago, Obama has demonstrated that his guiding philosophy for foreign affairs is that the US and its allies are to blame for their adversaries' hostility toward them. All that needs to happen for peace to break out throughout the world is for the US and its allies to quit clinging to their guns and religions and start apologizing for their rudeness. In furtherance of this goal, Obama has devoted himself to putting the screws on US allies, slashing America's defense budget and embarking on a worldwide tour apologizing to US adversaries.

The basic reality that the US is being led by a radical ideologue who clings to his views in the face of overwhelming proof of their falsity is the most fundamental fact that world leaders must reckon with today as they formulate policies to contend with the Obama administration. This is first and foremost the case for Israel.

Since the Netanyahu government took office three months ago, the Obama administration has placed inordinate pressure on Jerusalem in a bid to coerce it into making massive concessions to the Palestinians. These concessions are demanded not for peace, but simply for the sake of placing pressure on Israel. Obama wishes to pressure Israel to show his good intentions to the Arabs and Iran.

To date, Obama's loudest demand has been to officially prohibit all Jewish construction in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. Although the demand is intrinsically bigoted, illegal and immoral, and although the consequences of the expulsion of all Jews from Gaza in 2005 show that Israeli land giveaways and ethnic cleansing bring war not peace, the Netanyahu government has opted not to get into an open confrontation with the administration on the issue.

Instead, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and his government have sought to treat Obama's offensive as a routine disagreement between otherwise close allies. Rather than defending the principles of Jewish national, legal and human rights and the country's right to security, Netanyahu has sought to reach an accommodation with Obama by reducing the discussion to a conversation about the

inevitable natural growth of Jewish communities due to expanding families.

But what Obama's slavish devotion to his radical world view shows is that Netanyahu's decision to seek an accommodation is not simply an exercise in futility, it is a recipe for disaster. Obama and his advisers do not care that Jewish fertility rates are the fastest rising in the world. They do not care that by arguing for a complete halt in "natural" growth, they are effectively adopting a eugenics argument the likes of which no US policy-maker has dared to advance since before the Holocaust. They are looking to fight because they believe that the US is best served by fighting with its allies - particularly with Israel. Any concession Netanyahu makes will just form the basis for the next round of demands.

Far from seeking an agreement with Obama, Netanyahu should realize that given the president's ideological rigidity, there is no agreement to be had. Instead of trying to resolve the issue, Netanyahu's goal should be to prolong discussions until Obama finds someone else to pick on.

Rather than making wrongheaded concessions to Obama on Jewish population growth in the vain hope of mollifying him, Israel should go on the offensive on issues where it has something to gain from a confrontation. Two specific issues - aside from Iran's nuclear program - should be raised in this regard.

First, in recent months the Obama administration has applied massive pressure on Israel to remove its military forces from Judea and Samaria, curtail its counterterror operations and allow US-trained, anti-Israel Palestinian military forces to deploy in the towns and cities. Rather than openly oppose these demands, in the interests of cultivating good relations, the Netanyahu government has gone along with the program. This it has done in spite of the fact that the Palestinian forces now deploying throughout the areas have a history of participating in and supporting terror attacks against Israel as well as terrorizing their own people.

Last week the government quietly announced that the IDF is pulling out of most Palestinian population centers and turning the keys over to these hostile US-trained forces. This was a mistake.

In the weeks to come, the government should bluntly and publicly discuss and protest Fatah political and military leaders' continued support for terrorists and terrorist attacks against Israel. Netanyahu and his government should also detail human-rights abuses Fatah personnel routinely carry out against Palestinian journalists, businessmen and other civilians. The administration should be forced to defend its decision to empower these corrupt, terror-supporting brutes at the expense of Israel's

security, and to force US taxpayers to foot the bill for its cockamamie priorities.

The second issue is US military aid. For years Israel's detractors have pointed to this aid as "proof" that Israel is a strategic burden for America. But in recent years, and particularly since the Obama administration took office, it is becoming increasingly clear that US military assistance may be a greater burden for Israel than for the US.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that the Pentagon has forced Israel Aerospace Industries to back out of a joint partnership with a Swedish aerospace company to compete in a multi-billion dollar tender to sell new multi-role fighters to the Indian air force. And as the Post reported, this is the second major deal the Pentagon has forced Israel to withdraw from in the past year. Last summer it was forced to bow out of a \$500 million tender to supply the Turkish army with a new main battle tank. In both cases, US firms were competing in the tenders and the Pentagon threatened that Israeli participation would risk continued US-Israeli cooperation.

Today the Israel Air Force faces the prospect of not having a new-generation fighter. The Pentagon has placed so many draconian restrictions on its purchase of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, and raised the price so high, that it makes little strategic or economic sense to purchase it. So too, last week the Israel Navy announced it has decided to explore the option of building its own warships rather than buy one of two competing US naval platforms as planned because the US contractors' costs have gone up so high. The Navy is also taking into consideration the fact that by building domestic platforms, it will provide needed employment to shipyard workers.

All in all, both in terms of pure economics and in terms of the massive and constantly escalating restrictions the Obama administration is now placing on Israeli use of US technologies and munitions, maintaining US military assistance makes less and less sense with each passing day.

Were Israel to initiate a conversation about cutting back on this assistance, it would be able to ensure that the talks take place on its terms. Moreover, given the fact that Israel may indeed be best served by simply ending its military assistance package, the risk involved in such discussions would not be particularly earth shattering. Finally, by making clear that it is not dependent on Obama's kindness, it would be expanding its maneuvering room on other issues as well.

What Obama's radicalism tells us is that he is not a man who is moved by rational discourse. He is not a man who is willing to be convinced that he is mistaken. But even in these dire circumstances,

Israel is not without good options for securing its interests vis-a-vis Washington.

To do so, Jerusalem must first understand that it gains nothing from making concessions to a president bent on picking a fight with it. Then it

must recognize that there are issues where a confrontation with Obama can serve its interests. Finally it must pursue those issues with energy and passion.

A guide to Israeli settlements

By Gershom Gorenberg The Los Angeles Times June 28, 2009

How and when did they start, why are they spreading, what are the concerns and should anything be done about them?

In Cairo this month, President Obama urged Israel to stop settlement construction in the occupied territories. "The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements," he said. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in his own policy speech soon after, ardently defended the communities and the people who live in them. "The settlers are neither the enemies of the people nor the enemies of peace. Rather, they are an integral part of our people."

So what's all the fuss? We present a guide for the perplexed.

For starters, what's a settlement? As used today, the term usually refers to an Israeli community built in the territories that Israel conquered in the Six-Day War in June 1967. Israel removed its settlements from the Sinai after making peace with Egypt in 1979, and unilaterally evacuated its Gaza Strip settlements in 2005. So the dispute today deals with the Golan Heights and especially the West Bank. Some of the settlements are tiny, but many are large suburban towns such as Maale Adumim, east of Jerusalem, and Ariel, east of Tel Aviv. These bedroom communities have attracted Israelis, both secular and religious, looking for inexpensive homes. The fastest-growing are those intended exclusively for ultra-Orthodox Jews. With low incomes and large families, the ultra-Orthodox need cheap housing. Playing to that need, successive Israeli governments have drawn them to towns such as Modi'in Illit, southeast of Tel Aviv, where more than 40,000 people now live. The great majority of settlers live in large towns, most of them close to the Green Line.

What's the Green Line? It's the armistice line between Israel and its Arab neighbors, drawn in 1949 at the end of Israel's war of independence. It's also known as the pre-1967 border. After the Six-Day War, Israel extended Israeli law to East Jerusalem (and later, the Golan Heights), which in practical terms meant annexation. But the rest of the West Bank remained under military occupation, with Palestinian autonomous rule in some areas. No other country has recognized Israeli sovereignty in East Jerusalem or the Golan Heights. So for international purposes, the Green Line is the border between Israel and occupied territory. The most recent Israeli

figures found about 290,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank, not counting East Jerusalem.

And what about East Jerusalem? In the annexed areas, Israel has built large neighborhoods where nearly 200,000 Israelis now live. Israel considers those neighborhoods part of sovereign Israel. The U.S., like other countries, calls them settlements.

When did all this start? The first settlement in the Golan Heights was quietly established by young Israelis from left-wing kibbutz movements in July 1967, with the quiet help of government officials and army officers. The first West Bank settlement, Kfar Etzion, was established by Orthodox Israelis in September 1967 with public fanfare and government backing.

What's an outpost? The outposts are small, unofficial settlements, usually clumps of mobile homes on a hilltop, created after the government stopped approving new settlements in the mid-1990s. Though they lack legal authorization, they've received extensive help from state agencies -- as a scathing government-commissioned report documented. Under the U.S.-backed 2003 "road map" for peace, Israel is required to evacuate outposts built since 2001. So far, only a few tiny ones have been dismantled -- and settlers have subsequently rebuilt them.

So why have settlements been built? They are intended to "establish facts" -- to ensure continued Israeli control of part or all of the occupied territory. For some settlement advocates, the main purpose is security -- to add territory to make Israel more defensible. For others, the key point is that the West Bank -- referred to as Judea and Samaria -- is part of the historic Jewish homeland. Israelis learn the Bible as their national history, and places in the West Bank such as Hebron, Bethlehem and Shiloh are the setting of much of that history. Religious settlers believe God promised the land to the Jews and that Israel's settlement of it is a fulfillment of that promise. In practice, every Israeli government since 1967 has promoted settlement -- helping to fund construction and providing financial incentives to settlers. Left-wing governments have focused on areas they considered important for security and where few Palestinians live. Right-wing governments have encouraged settlement throughout the West Bank.

Why is this a problem? Since 1967, some Israelis have argued that keeping the West Bank creates an unbearable dilemma. If Israel maintains permanent rule over the Palestinians without giving them citizenship, it ceases to be a democracy. If it annexes the territory and grants them citizenship, it will no longer be a country with a Jewish majority -- contradicting the most basic goal of Zionism. Today, the only practical way out of this dilemma is a two-state solution, with the Palestinians receiving independence in the Gaza Strip and all or nearly all of the West Bank. To create a Palestinian state that is more than fragmented enclaves, most or all settlements must be evacuated. Continued construction only makes this more difficult.

Where has America been until now? In principle, the U.S. has consistently opposed all settlements, including the Jewish neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. However, most administrations have avoided confrontations over the issue, especially when peace negotiations were underway. In the meantime, settlements kept growing. Public diplomatic tussles during the Carter and George H.W. Bush administrations were exceptions.

Obama and Palestine

By Jeff Robbins *The Wall Street Journal*

The Administration's distancing of itself from Israel is likely to empower those who believe that American support can be degraded. In his new book, "One State, Two States: Resolving The Israel/Palestine Conflict," historian Benny Morris recounts the lugubrious history of Palestinian refusal to actually accept Israel as a Jewish state in the heart of the uniformly Muslim Middle East. Morris examines the widespread rejection by Palestinians in particular and Arabs in general of a two-state solution that, he points out, has been "a constant refrain of Palestinian leaders ... throughout the history of the Palestinian national movement," up to and including the present.

The refusal of Palestinian politicians, academics and clerics to stipulate that they accept a permanent Jewish state existing next to a Palestinian state is, of course, at once a dirty little secret and the 800 pound gorilla in the room when it comes to the debate over the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

For over 80 years, as Morris notes, Palestinians have "persuasively demonstrated" that they do not want any Jewish state in the region, regardless of the boundaries, and regardless of the settlement policy pursued by this Israeli government or that one. The Palestinian rejection of any Jewish state has not merely been the recurring theme of the conflict, but the dominant one. Thus, in the 1930s, the Palestinians rejected a proposed two-state solution that would have created a Jewish state in less than 20 percent of Palestine. In the 1940s, the Palestinians

Speaking of America, aren't most settlers from the U.S.? Absolutely not. The misconception that settlements are heavily American may stem from foreign correspondents looking for English-speakers to interview when they visit.

Why the tension today? Obama is insisting that Israel freeze further building in settlements, as called for in the road map. That position fits his goal of achieving a two-state solution. Netanyahu insists that building is needed to allow for "natural growth" of settlements. But settlements have been growing much more quickly than the rest of Israel. Decisions to build, as always, are political choices intended to "create facts." Obama doesn't want construction to preempt negotiations. Unlike most previous presidents, he is insisting that American opposition to settlements is more than mere words.

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rejected the United Nations partition plan which created a Jewish state on less than half of the arable land in Palestine. From 1948 to 1967, when Israel had no presence in Gaza, the West Bank or East Jerusalem, the Arabs created no Palestinian state. After the 1967 war, when Israel accepted the land-for-peace formulation in UN Resolution 242, the Arab world, including the Palestinians, rejected it. In 2000, when Israel supported a plan put forth by President Clinton that would have created an independent Palestinian state with a capital in East Jerusalem comprising all of Gaza and virtually all of the West Bank, the Palestinians rejected this too, instead commencing a campaign of bombings that left 1,100 Israelis dead and, not incidentally, 4,000 Palestinians dead as well.

And in 2006, when Israel unilaterally and forcibly removed thousands of settlers from the Gaza Strip, abandoning any Jewish presence there, Palestinians responded by rocketing Israeli civilian centers, eventually leaving Israel with the unenviable choice between abandoning ever greater numbers of its civilians to daily Palestinian rocket attacks, on one hand, or entering Gaza to stop those attacks, with the inevitable harm done to civilians there, on the other. For its part, the Hamas leadership, which had assassinated many of its opponents and achieved a military takeover of Gaza, was more than content to trade hundreds of Palestinian lives in Gaza for the international criticism of Israel which Israel's efforts

to protect its civilians from these rocket attacks would reliably trigger.

Recently, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas told The Washington Post that the Palestinians had once again rejected a two-state solution. Former Prime Minister Olmert, Abbas told the Post, had recently offered an independent Palestinian state comprising all of Gaza, a capital in East Jerusalem and 97 percent of the West Bank - - and Abbas had flatly rejected this as well. "The gaps," Abbas said, without elaboration, "were too wide."

In the meantime, Abbas refused to recognize Israel as a Jewish state, telling the Post that he preferred to let the passage of time take its course, confident that American and international pressure on Israel would further weaken Israel's position. "Until then," Abbas said, "in the West Bank we have a good reality...the people are living a good life." And just last week, despite yet more stories in the western media that Hamas was at last "moderating" its position on Israel, Hamas informed former President Carter, whose credulousness on the conflict is a source of some wonderment, that as it had previously made clear, it would never recognize Israel's right to exist under any circumstances.

The problem with these facts is that they get in the way of an increasingly fashionable orthodoxy: that it is Israeli settlements on the West Bank that are the obstacle to peace between Palestinians and Israelis. Despite the record recounted so soberingly by Morris, this is a line that is advanced by Palestinian supporters in the West with great vigor, even as Palestinians have been proclaiming somewhat indiscreetly that, actually, the trouble with Israel has nothing to do with settlements and everything to do with its existence, which, three generations after Israel's founding, remains unacceptable.

Morris rather elegantly characterizes the bobbing and weaving of Palestinian spokespeople who profess moderation while continuing to reject Israel's right to exist as "elisions, disingenuousness and vagueness." It might be described less gently as mendacity. Nevertheless, the line that it is Israeli settlements that are the problem, and Prime Minister Netanyahu's reluctance to remove them that is the fundamental impediment to peace, has attained a certain gospel-like adherence in certain quarters and, increasingly, among Democrats. As Dennis Ross and David Makovsky write with understatement in their own new book, "Myths, Illusions and Peace: Finding a New Direction for America in the Middle East," "those on the left...tend to dismiss ideological opposition to Israel's existence."

For Democrats who voted for Barack Obama, but who regard the encirclement of Israel by well-armed fanatics pledged to its destruction with some alarm, the President's treatment of Prime Minister Netanyahu on the occasion of their first meeting has provoked a certain unease. The Obama Administration's pointed and singular focus on Israeli settlements while downplaying the underlying problem of Palestinian rejectionism, the extensive leaking aimed at letting the world know what little regard the Administration has for Israel's newly-elected leader, and Vice President Biden's ostentatious scolding of Israel's supporters at a recent AIPAC conference, can all be regarded as part of a master plan, intended to bring the Arab world into the peace process by demonstrating that American policy toward Israel has changed. Under this theory, Obama's stiff-arming of Israel might be viewed as the diplomatic equivalent of a Hail Mary pass, intended to improve the desperate situation of President Abbas and empower Abbas and other relative moderates to persuade the Arab masses to finally accept a Jewish state.

The risk, of course, is that rather than enhancing the stature of moderates and reducing the influence of those who openly pronounce that what they really seek is the disappearance of Israel, the Obama Administration's gambit will have the opposite effect. The record of Palestinians professing in the West to accept a two-state solution while assuring their own people that they refuse to accept any such solution is incontrovertible, and does not appear to have evolved to any meaningful degree, as Morris points out.

The Administration's purposeful distancing of itself from Israel is likely to empower those who have always believed, and who continue to believe, that in the fullness of time, American support for Israel can be degraded, and with it Israel's ability to survive. Those in the Arab world who have counseled that that is the case—and there are many of them—will take the Administration's insistence that it wishes to be "an honest broker" as evidence that, at long last, American support for Israel has begun to erode, and that it is only a matter of time before it is no longer necessary for them to pretend that it is a two-state solution in which they are interested. If this proves to be the case, the Obama Administration, while intending to be helpful, will have inadvertently dealt whatever prospects exist for Middle East peace a serious blow.

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Palestinians want to build settlements

By Khaled Abu Toameh The Jerusalem Post June 25, 2009

The last thing that Abu Mohammed al-Najjar wants is for Israel to succumb to US and European pressure and halt construction in the West Bank settlements. As far as the 58-year-old laborer is concerned, freezing the construction would be a disaster not only for him and his family, but for thousands of other Palestinians working in various settlements in the West Bank.

Of course, this does not mean that they support Israel's policy of construction in the settlements. But for them, it's simply a matter of being able to support their families. "I don't care what the leaders say and do," al-Najjar told The Jerusalem Post at one of the new construction sites in Ma'aleh Adumim. "I need to feed my seven children, and that's all I care about for now." The phenomenon of Palestinians building new homes for Jewish settlers is not new. In fact, Palestinian laborers have been working in the construction business from the first day the settlements began in the West Bank.

Today, Palestinian Authority officials estimate, more than 12,000 Palestinians are employed by both Jewish and Arab contractors building new homes in the settlements. In some cases, Palestinians have found jobs in settlements that are located near their villages and towns.

Jamal Abu Sharikheh, 27, of the village of Bet Ur al-Tahta, has been working as a construction laborer in Givat Ze'ev for the past three years.

Asked if he had any problem building homes in the settlements at a time when the international community was demanding that Israel freeze the construction work, the father of four also said he was trying to support his family "in a dignified manner." He and most of the laborers interviewed by the Post over the past week said they had never come under pressure from fellow Palestinians to stay away from work in the settlements.

"If they want us to leave our work, they should offer us an alternative," Abu Sharikheh said. "We don't come to work in the settlements for ideological reasons or because we support the settlement movement. We come here because our Palestinian and Arab governments haven't done anything to provide us with better jobs." Back in Ma'aleh Adumim, most of the Palestinian laborers said they had no problem revealing their identities.

"We're not doing anything wrong," explained Ibrahim Abu Tair, a 42-year-old father of eight from the village of Um Tuba, southwest of Jerusalem. "We're not collaborators and we're not terrorists. We just want to work." He said that during the first intifada, which began at the end of 1987, some Palestinian groups tried to stop Palestinians from heading to work in the settlements.

"In the beginning there were threats and physical assaults on some workers," he noted. "But the leaders of the intifada later realized that depriving the laborers of their livelihood would have a boomerang effect on the Palestinians. That's why they allowed the workers to go to the settlements."

Even today the PA does not object to Palestinians working in settlements, although its representatives say they would like to see the Palestinians work elsewhere.

"We can't tell the workers to stay at home without providing them with solutions," admitted a Palestinian official in Ramallah. "We're talking about thousands of families in the West Bank that rely on this work as their sole source of income."

Some of the laborers said that boycotting work in the settlements would be ineffective and pointless because their employers would have no difficulty replacing them with Chinese or other foreign workers. "Look how many foreign workers there are inside Israel today," complained Jawdat Uwaisat, 44, of the village of Sawahreh in the Bethlehem area. "There are about 150,000 workers from different countries who have taken our places of work inside Israel. They are even bringing workers from Thailand and Turkey." He said that he and his colleagues working for Israelis earn almost three times what they would receive doing the same work for Palestinian construction companies.

"The Palestinian employers pay us NIS 100 to NIS 150 a day," Uwaisat said. "The Israeli companies, by contrast, pay NIS 350 to NIS 450 a day. That's why many of us prefer to work for Israeli companies, even if the construction is in the settlements." He added that even Palestinians known as supporters of Hamas and Islamic Jihad are employed as construction workers in settlements.

"I know some people from Hamas who work as construction laborers in Ariel," he said. "When people want to feed their children, they don't think twice." While most of the laborers told the Post that they were opposed to the settlements, they nevertheless stressed that they would continue to show up for work every day. "If you see how big some of these settlements are, you will understand why the talk about a two-state solution is kalam fadi [nonsense]," commented Iyad Mansour, 55, of the Kalandia refugee camp, who has been working in Ma'aleh Adumim for the past three years.

"These settlements are growing every day at a very fast pace," he said. "One day you see empty land, the next day you see new buildings. They are really fast in planning and building. But who knows? Maybe these settlements will one day become homes for Palestinian refugees."