

**CONSTRUCTION, DESTRUCTION, DECONSTRUCTION: IS A
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Isranet Daily Briefing, August 17, 2011

<https://www.isranet.org/daily-briefing/construction-destruction-deconstruction-palestinian-state-key-peace-peace-really-possible/>

**CRITIQUING ISRAELI CONSTRUCTION IN JERUSALEM:
ANOTHER U.S. MISCUE WITH THE QUARTET**

Robert Satloff

Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 17, 2011 

At the eleventh hour, the Obama administration is gamely trying to avert President Mahmoud Abbas's promise to apply for full Palestinian membership in the United Nations—which he is due to hand deliver to the UN secretary-general on September 20—by restarting Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. The trigger for new talks, which have been suspended by a Palestinian walkout since last autumn, would be a declaration by the Quartet (the United States, European Union, UN, and Russia) defining terms of reference or parameters for the resumption of talks.

The U.S. strategy is to entice the Palestinians away from their self-generated diplomatic train wreck at the UN by building on President Obama's May 2011 speech, endorsed by the G-8 at Deauville, that included the Palestinian-friendly formula of "1967 lines with mutual swaps." No less important as an arrow in the administration's quiver is the sense that the Europeans would prefer a diplomatic alternative to a showdown at the UN, which would not only force a break with Washington but is likely to divide the EU's big three (with France expected to support the Palestinians, Germany supporting the Israelis, and Britain still on the fence).

Despite having logic and reason on its side, the Obama team has had no success. There are multiple reasons for this: the administration delivered its main concession (the 1967 lines) too early in the process, and the Palestinians and Europeans have since pocketed the provision; EU diplomats prefer to cherry-pick the president's May speech, taking the pro-Palestinian aspects (e.g., about the 1967 lines) and rejecting those favorable to Israel (e.g., mutual recognition of Israel as a state for the Jewish people and Palestine as a state for the Palestinian people); the Palestinian leadership is too committed to the UN route to stop the train; and Israel waited too long to accept a formula that may provide an alternative to the UN. Even so, the administration claims to be plowing

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[ahead with the Quartet effort, leaving the group's envoy, Tony Blair, to](https://www.isranet.org/daily-briefing/construction-destruction-deconstruction-palestinian-state-key-peace-peace-really-ahead-with-the-Quartet-effort-leaving-the-group's-envoy-Tony-Blair-to-do-the-heavy-lifting-evidently-with-the-idea-of-maintaining-plausible-deniability-that-Washington-is-inching-back-from-any-commitments-or-accepting-dilution-of-the-president's-language)
[do the heavy lifting—evidently with the idea of maintaining plausible](https://www.isranet.org/daily-briefing/construction-destruction-deconstruction-palestinian-state-key-peace-peace-really-ahead-with-the-Quartet-effort-leaving-the-group's-envoy-Tony-Blair-to-do-the-heavy-lifting-evidently-with-the-idea-of-maintaining-plausible-deniability-that-Washington-is-inching-back-from-any-commitments-or-accepting-dilution-of-the-president's-language)
[deniability that Washington is inching back from any commitments or](https://www.isranet.org/daily-briefing/construction-destruction-deconstruction-palestinian-state-key-peace-peace-really-ahead-with-the-Quartet-effort-leaving-the-group's-envoy-Tony-Blair-to-do-the-heavy-lifting-evidently-with-the-idea-of-maintaining-plausible-deniability-that-Washington-is-inching-back-from-any-commitments-or-accepting-dilution-of-the-president's-language)
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In this context, yesterday's Quartet statement expressing "great concern" about Israeli plans to build additional housing in Jerusalem and the large West Bank settlement of Ariel seems, at best, to run counter to the overall U.S. effort. At a time when Washington is trying to win European support for a new Quartet statement designed to cajole Palestinians away from a UN gambit, it makes little sense for the administration to give away, for free, a condemnation of Israel. In terms of substance, it is bad enough that the administration has once again endorsed the concept that Israeli construction in Jerusalem is forbidden. And at the tactical level, it is even worse that the administration would compound this policy error with the negotiating error of trading away something the Europeans will always sign up for (condemnation of Israel's settlement policy) without getting something they are revealingly reluctant to do in return (endorse, as a goal of negotiations, the mutual recognition of Israel and Palestine as the nation-states for the Jewish and Palestinian peoples, respectively). With the Palestinian train heading toward the UN, the light at the end of the tunnel is really just Quartet diplomacy heading in the wrong direction.

(Robert Satloff is executive director of The Washington Institute.)

WILL ARIEL BLOCK PEACE?

Elliot Abrams

CNN, August 16, 2011

If there is a single issue that explains the failure of Obama policy toward Israel, it is settlements. And this week the Administration once again indulged itself in a knee-jerk reaction that displayed incomprehension in a way that harms U.S.-Israeli relations without doing the slightest bit of good for the Palestinians.

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This week Israel announced a plan to construct 277 more housing units in Ariel, a settlement that is a town of 18,000. The new units are to be constructed in the center of the town, it was also announced. This is a significant fact, for construction of new units at the edges of the town would mean that the security perimeter would need to be extended to protect the new housing and the people in it. But this will not happen, and Ariel will expand in population but not in land area. It is not, in the usual Palestinian Authority parlance, "taking more Palestinian land."

When I worked on these issues in the Bush Administration, we discussed settlement expansion thoroughly with the government of Israel and reached agreement on some principles.

These were that Israel would create no new settlements and that existing settlements would expand in population but not in land area. New construction, that is, would be in already-built-up areas, and the phrase we used was "build up and in, not out."

The usual complaints about new construction in the settlements were that "it is making a final peace agreement impossible" or at least more and more difficult by "taking more Palestinian land" that would have to be bargained over in the end and whose taking would right now interfere with Palestinian life and livelihoods. We understood that there would never be a long construction freeze even if there might be some brief ones, for the settlements - especially the "major blocks" that Israel will keep—are living communities with growing families.

So we reached that understanding with the Israelis: build up and in, not out. That way whatever the chances of a peace deal were, construction in the settlements would not reduce them.

This agreement the Obama Administration ignored or denounced, suggesting at various times that it never existed or that, anyway, it had been a bad idea and all construction must be frozen -even in Israel's capital, Jerusalem. (To be more accurate, construction by Israeli Jews was to be frozen; construction by Palestinians could continue).

No Israeli government could long accept such terms and though the Netanyahu government did agree to a short and partial freeze, when

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that failed to bring the Palestinian Liberation Organization back to the negotiating table the freeze was ended.

This Obama fixation with a construction freeze proved disastrous because the President and his Secretary of State took the view that it was a precondition for negotiations without which the Palestinians could not be expected to come to the table. Of course once that American position was announced the Palestinian leadership had to adopt it, lest they appear weaker in asserting Palestinian "rights" than Washington.

The argument over the construction freeze embittered U.S.-Israel relations and killed any chance of negotiations in 2009 and 2010. Late in 2010 the policy was finally abandoned. Nothing has replaced it, and no one really knows what Administration policy is these days beyond getting past September's expected UN General Assembly vote on Palestinian statehood.

But if the fixation on freezing construction in settlements is no longer the main pillar of Obama policy, those old sentiments and statements linger on. Thus did the announcement that new units were to be built in Ariel evoke a new denunciation from Washington.

To be sure, it did not come from the President himself and was a pretty low-key affair; it did not suggest that new a crisis in bilateral relations loomed. But this was a reminder that the Administration appears to have learned nothing, and still does not understand the difference between expanding a settlement physically and expanding the population of a settlement by building in already-built-up areas.

Why not? Without dealing with the question of which individual policymakers are responsible for this foolish policy, it does seem that the policy is based on the view that every square foot of land controlled by Jordan before the 1967 war is rightly part of "Palestine," so that every Israeli action on that land is wrong.

This view also explains why the President believes peace negotiations should start from the "1967 borders." But there are no "1967 borders," just the 1949 Armistice lines that all sides agreed in 1949 were not to be regarded as permanent.

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It is reasonable to have the 1949 map on the table when negotiations possible/begin, and to have next to it the 2011 map, and to seek a compromise. It is not reasonable to view it as a violation of international law and a threat to a peace agreement every time bricks and studs and drywall show up at the center of an Israeli settlement in the West Bank. In the real world those new units in Ariel do not make a final peace agreement harder.

(Elliott Abrams is a senior fellow for Middle East studies at the Council on Foreign Relations.)

**IF PALESTINE DECLARES STATEHOOD,
IT WON'T CHANGE ANYTHING ON THE GROUND**

Martin Peretz

New Republic, August 17, 2011

The Arabs of Palestine have always nurtured a strategy to avoid negotiating a peace deal with the Israelis; and it is that they won't negotiate at all unless Israel meets so many Palestinian preconditions that the map from which they and their Arab neighbors launched their wars would be completely restored in advance of talks. Poof: There was no Six Day War in 1967 and there was no Yom Kippur War in 1973. Forget both of these and smaller battles in between and after. Then, OK, let's meet and see where we can go from here or actually there. Which, as Barack Obama didn't quite have the nerve to say but certainly meant, is the armistice lines of 1949—yes, that's exactly what he intended and almost said....

It's true that Obama's [latest] scheme allows for a reciprocal transfer of real estate between Israel and the not quite nascent Palestine. But, given the fuss his administration has made even about Jewish land going back three millennia, like the City of David as if it had been a water hole or a mere parking lot for chariots, you have a sense of the utter ahistoricity of the president's perspectives on these matters. The fact is that Jews and Arabs will not live neighborly lives once it is clear that Palestinian half-rule does not mean the restoration of the Mandelbaum

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Gate and the Jews excluded from their deepest history and their most possible/sacred sites. (I know that many liberals and especially Jewish liberals don't cotton to the idea of Jewish sacred sites and think it downright primitive. Ah, but a Muslim shrine! Well, you know the difference, of course you do.)

For nearly 20 years, the world sat quite comfy with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, with help from the local Arabs, having occupied and then destroyed the entire ancient Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem which, according to the 1947 Palestine Partition and a later resolution, was supposed to be governed with the rest of the city, along with Bethlehem and other localities, as a *corpus separatum*....The internationalization scheme was dead. In response in 1949, Israel took "west Jerusalem" as its capitol, which almost no foreign government recognized formally, but all duly and dutifully sent their emissaries up to Zion for business.

Even given the facts established by the Jordanians in old Jerusalem and the neglect by them of the West Bank (called by history and modern Zionism, Judea and Samaria), the Israeli prime minister offered to restore the captured lands to Arab sovereignty. But already then—that is, 1967—Colonel Qaddafi was in power in Libya. He cast a thrall over the Arab League and established the principles of Arab diplomacy with Israel: no peace, no recognition, and no negotiations....

Palestine may or may not secure some sort of recognition for itself at the forthcoming meeting of the General Assembly, when the emissaries of dictatorships come to New York for a big shopping spree. But it will not much change things on the ground. In fact, the more the Palestinians deal in symbols the less ground they will have left to claim....

Take the new construction announced a few days ago by the Israelis for Ariel, 11 miles east of the Green Line, a literal agricultural line, green as in agriculturally developed, in case you wondered. Yes, it juts into the West Bank. But it is also 33 years old and has some 18,000 inhabitants. Now, 277 housing units will be built—and more if the Palestinians don't come to the table quickly. This, by the way, is neither a right-wing community nor a religious one. And it boasts a university with 11,000 students, of which close to 1,000 are Arab. There is no way that Ariel will be forfeited to the Palestinian Authority.

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The issue in Jerusalem is very different. And more intricate. It is, aside from being a Jewish city, also an Arab city. With Arab history, Arab hopes, Arab actualities. The cartography of a settlement in the city will take as least as much ingenuity as good will. Moreover, there is land to the east of the municipal lines on which "Arab Jerusalem" can be expanded as "Jewish Jerusalem" was expanded. Again, I have little idea of how exactly the "whole" city will be governed and even if it will be as a "whole."

But there are certain principles that cannot be ignored. The first of these is that this tiny place is the heart of Jewish history. The second, and by extension, is that the city is also the heart of Christian history.... Indeed, the denial of the epochal past of Jews and Christians (after all, they are intimately bound) is not worthy of the Muslims who recognize it in the Koran. Remember, then, that if there were no Jewish temple there was no Jesus or Jesus figure, and the entire history of Christianity collapses....

The major impediment to moving on is actually the relentless psychodrama of the president about new Israeli construction in the territories which is little and far between. It has squeezed the Palestinians into a corner where many of them and certainly most Israelis did not want them to go. Maybe it gave Obama some moral thrill to castigate one of America's most faithful allies. After all, he has not had many thrills at all. But the utter collapse of his Middle East diplomacy can be traced to his and Hillary Clinton's apoplexy over a small neighborhood here and another one there. And all of this rancor when the two of them were still playing out the charade of Bashar Assad as a force for peace. Shame on them for being so insistently stupid and for purporting to have the moral credit for going into hysterics over a few hundred apartments in a Jewish neighborhood that was founded in 1973 and already has 40,000 residents....

(Martin Peretz is editor-in-chief emeritus of The New Republic.)

PALESTINIANS WANT PEACE. JUST NOT WITH ISRAEL

George Jonas

National Post, August 13, 2011

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~~The Palestinian Authority proposes to become the 194th member of the United Nations by a unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state in September. Those who complain that such a declaration undermines the peace process with Israel don't understand that that's the declaration's purpose.~~

If "Palestine 194" were designed to coexist with the Jewish state, it wouldn't have to be declared unilaterally. Since it's designed to replace it, it has no other choice. If the Palestinian state comes about as a result of negotiations, it legitimizes the Jewish state.

It isn't that Palestinians don't want peace. They want peace, all right; it's only that they don't want peace with Israel....

Many Arabs say that the Jews stole "the land." They didn't, but some Jews did have the idea of buying "the land"—not from the Arabs, who didn't own it, but from the Turks, who did.

In those days most nations and territories belonged to the dynasties that ruled them. Palestine, the biblical homeland of the Jews, was a possession of the Ottoman dynasty, ruled by the sultan of Turkey, Abdul Hamid II....

[Theodore] Herzl, a subject of the Habsburg emperor, Franz Josef of Austria-Hungary, hoped to persuade the Hohenzollern emperor, Wilhelm II of Germany, to support an approach to the Ottoman sultan Abdul Hamid II, to let a consortium put together by the House of Rothschild make him an offer for a homeland in Palestine for the Jews. Buying a country sounds impossible today, even somehow wrong, but it didn't then, and Herzl lived then, not today....

The Sultan had financial woes. It was conceivable he might consider an offer for his arid possession. Early Zionists took it for granted that Palestinian Arabs would welcome their plan. The Arabs were tenants, not owners of the land; surely they would prefer a progressive Jewish democracy to an inefficient and corrupt Ottoman overlord....

As it turned out, the Sultan wouldn't sell, which was just as well because no funds were raised sufficient for the purchase of a country by the

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Rothschilds or anyone else. Herzl soon died, and before long the Ottoman empire—the sick man of Europe, as it was called—also collapsed.

The victorious European powers, essentially the French and the British, split up the Sultan's possessions, meaning to manage them for their own benefit as well as the benefit of their inhabitants, Arab and Jewish. For a mixture of reasons, not all selfish, but unwise all the same, the British turned their Palestinian mandate into the powder keg of the Twice Promised Land. When the dust settled, about 80% of the Balfour Declaration's Jewish homeland had become the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, with the 1937 Peel Commission inviting the Palestinians and the Zionists to split the remaining 20% between them.

The Jews, though unhappy, said yes to Lord Peel. The Arabs said no. They said no again 10 years later when the United Nations voted for partition in 1947. Israel declared itself a state on May 15, 1948, and within about five hours the "rejectionist" Arab states attacked it. That is the war that continues to this day. It's a conflict the Arab world can afford to lose over and over again. Israel's first loss would be its last.

It follows that peace is the only way Israel can win, and peace is the only way the Arab side can lose. Under such circumstances, Israelis would be fools not to give land for peace, while Arabs would be fools to give peace for land. Neither side are fools....

It's hard to say whether [Mahmoud] Abbas believes in the unilateral Palestinian state or not. Perhaps he just believes in retiring with a bang rather than a whimper. This would be quite realistic and I'd give it a 50-50 chance. The only thing that has no chance in the Middle East is peace.