

PPI Condemns the Administration's Endorsement of West Bank Settlements

PARTNERS FOR PROGRESSIVE ISRAEL CONDEMNS THE ADMINISTRATION'S ENDORSEMENT OF WEST BANK SETTLEMENTS

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For immediate release

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's Nov. 18 announcement that the U.S. now regards Israel's West Bank settlement enterprise as "not inconsistent with international law" is just the latest blow delivered by the Trump administration to the prospects of a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine. It follows a series of similar steps designed to abet the clearly expressed annexation desires of Prime Minister Netanyahu, including President Trump's refusal to endorse a two-state solution as U.S. policy and the State Department's removal of the words "occupied territory" from its description of the West Bank.

The Secretary of State insisted in his speech that the change in policy did not mean that the U.S. was "prejudging the ultimate status of the West Bank," but, as with previous Trump administration shifts of policy on Israel-Palestine, such language is employed only to obfuscate the real far-reaching nature of this step. The true underlying message of Secretary Pompeo's announcement was not lost on cabinet ministers in Binyamin Netanyahu's government, who thanked the Trump administration profusely for the support it had now given to their plans to permanently cement Israeli control over the West Bank – and to swiftly turn that control into a formal annexation of the area.

Rather than seeking to play the role of honest broker and bridge the gaps between the two sides, the Trump administration has again adopted the terms of reference used exclusively by one side – and in doing so has further undermined U.S. credibility. In stating that the U.S. position on the West Bank was not applicable to other situations around the world because the Israeli settlements were a "unique" case, the Secretary of State essentially parroted the Israeli position that the status of the occupied territories is "sui generis" – one of a kind – and therefore not covered under the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949). Article 49 of the Convention states clearly that an "Occupying Power shall not ... transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies."

Notwithstanding the new American position, we remain heartened that the fundamental international consensus regarding the occupied territories and the settlements remains unchanged, as enunciated in UN Security Council resolution 2334: "The establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just,

lasting and comprehensive peace.”

Partners for Progressive Israel unequivocally supports the many Israelis who recognize the disastrous implications of annexation, including the likelihood of permanent war with the Palestinians and the prevention of real and open diplomatic relations with the Arab states, as offered since 2002 in the Arab League Initiative. Whichever way the current governmental stalemate goes, we hope that enough Israelis will realize the dangers of annexation and the implications of that choice.

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