

# Quotes from U.S. Government Officials Concerning Israeli Settlements

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## The Obama Administration

"We reject in the strongest terms the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlement activity. For more than four decades, Israeli settlement activity in territories occupied in 1967 has undermined Israel's security and corroded hopes for peace and stability in the region. Continued settlement activity violates Israel's international commitments, devastates trust between the parties, and threatens the prospects for peace."

"While we agree with our fellow Council members—and indeed, with the wider world—about the folly and illegitimacy of continued Israeli settlement activity, we think it unwise for this Council to attempt to resolve the core issues that divide Israelis and Palestinians."

**Ambassador Susan Rice – February 18, 2011**

"Israel's settlement moratorium has made a difference on the ground, and improved the atmosphere for talks. ... We believe that the moratorium should be extended." **President Obama to the UN General Assembly – September 23, 2010**

"I think that additional settlement building does not contribute to Israel's security. I think it makes it harder for them to make peace with their neighbors. I think it embitters the Palestinians in a way that could end up being very dangerous." **President Obama – November 18, 2009**

"The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements. This construction violates previous agreements and undermines efforts to achieve peace. It is time for these settlements to stop." **President Obama in Cairo – June 4, 2009**

"With respect to settlements, the President was very clear when Prime Minister Netanyahu was here. He wants to see a stop to settlements – not some settlements, not outposts, not natural growth exceptions. We think it is in the best interests of the effort that we are engaged in that settlement expansion cease. That is our position. That is what we have communicated very clearly, not only to the Israelis but to the Palestinians and others. And we intend to press that

point." **Secretary of State Hillary R. Clinton in a joint press conference with Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Ali Aboul Gheit – May 28, 2009**

“And yes, I underscored the longstanding American policy that does not accept the legitimacy of continued settlements.” **Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at AIPAC – March 22, 2009**

“First, we want to see a stop to settlement construction, additions, natural growth – any kind of settlement activity. That is what the President has called for.” **Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in an interview with Abderrahim Foukara of Al Jazeera – May 19, 2009**

"...Settlements have to be stopped in order for us to move forward. That's a difficult issue. I recognize that, but it's an important one and it has to be addressed." **Remarks by President Barack Obama in a press conference with Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel – May 18, 2009**

### **The George W. Bush Administration**

“[T]hey should not be expanding the settlements. There should not be expansion of the settlements and outposts should be removed.” **Sean McCormack, Spokesman, Daily Press Briefing – September 7, 2006**

“Israel must continue to work with Palestinian leaders to help improve the daily lives of Palestinians. At the same time, Israel should not undertake any activity that contravenes its road map obligations, or prejudices the final status negotiations with regard to Gaza, the West Bank, and Jerusalem. This means that Israel must remove unauthorized posts and stop settlement expansion.” **President Bush speaking with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas – October 20, 2005**

“Israel should not undertake any activity that contravenes road map obligations or prejudice final status negotiations with regard to Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem. Therefore, Israel must remove unauthorized outposts and stop settlement expansion.” **President Bush speaking with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas – May 26, 2005**

“Now, our position on settlement activity has not changed. We have said to the Israelis that they have obligations under the roadmap, they have obligations not to increase settlement activity.” **Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Interview with LA Times – March 24, 2005**

“I would say that we continue -- our policy continues to be that Israel should freeze settlement construction.” **Daily Press Briefing by Adam Ereli, Deputy Spokesman – December 31, 2003**

"Settlement activity must stop. And it has not stopped to our satisfaction." **Secretary Colin Powell – September 21, 2003**

"Israel has got responsibilities. Israel must deal with the settlements. Israel must make sure there is a contiguous territory that the Palestinians can call home." **President Bush – June 3, 2003**

“Our position on settlements, I think, has been very consistent, very clear. The secretary expressed it not too long ago. He said settlement activity has severely undermined Palestinian trust and hope, preempts and prejudices the outcome of negotiations, and in doing so, cripples chances for real peace and prosperity. The U.S. has long opposed settlement activity and,

consistent with the report of the Mitchell Committee, settlement activity must stop.” **Richard Boucher, U.S. Department of State – Daily Press Briefing – November 25, 2002**

“Our opposition to the settlements is political. Washington feels that Israel would be better protected and more accepted inside borders where there are no settlements, so a decision on their future must be accepted on the basis of their feasibility. It is a fact that we have opposed the settlements for decades and you continue to build them and we have done nothing untoward to you [in response]. If Israel wants, it can even expand to the borders promised in the Bible. The question is whether it is able to do so from a security and political standpoint.” **Daniel Kurtzer, U.S. Ambassador to Israel – May 29, 2002 – Ha’aretz**

“Consistent with the Mitchell plan, Israeli settlement activity in occupied territories must stop, and the occupation must end through withdrawal to secure and recognized boundaries, consistent with United Nations Resolutions 242 and 338.” **President Bush’s Rose Garden Address – April 4, 2002**

“During the half-century of its existence, Israel has had the strong support of the United States. In international forums, the United States has at times cast the only vote on Israel’s behalf. Yet, even in such a close relationship there are some difficulties. Prominent among those differences is the U.S. government’s long-standing opposition to the Government of Israel’s policies and practices regarding settlements.” . . . . “The GOI should freeze all settlement activity, including the “natural growth” of existing settlements. The kind of security cooperation desired by the GOI cannot for long co-exist with settlement activity described very recently by the European Union as causing “great concern” and by the United States as “provocative.” **The Mitchell Report – April 30, 2001**

### **The Clinton Administration**

“The Israeli people also must understand that . . . the settlement enterprise and building bypass roads in the heart of what they already know will one day be part of a Palestinian state is inconsistent with the Oslo commitment that both sides negotiate a compromise.” **President Clinton’s farewell address to the Middle East – January 7, 2001**

“We write you because we are concerned that unilateral actions, such as expansion of settlements, would be strongly counterproductive to the goal of a negotiated solution and, if carried forward, could halt progress made by the peace process over the last two decades. Such a tragic result would threaten the security of Israel, the Palestinians, friendly Arab states, and undermine U.S. interests in the Middle East.” **Excerpt from a letter written to H.E. Benjamin Netanyahu on December 14, 1996. The letter was signed by: James A. Baker III (Former Sec. of State), Zbigniew Brzezinski (Former National Security Adviser), Frank C. Carlucci (Former National Security Adviser), Lawrence S. Eagleburger (Former Sec. of State), Richard Fairbanks (Former Mid East Peace Negotiator), Brent Scowcroft (Former National Security Adviser), Robert S. Straus (Former Middle East Peace Negotiator), Cyrus R. Vance (Former Sec. of State).**

### **The George H.W. Bush Administration**

“The United States believes that no party should take unilateral actions that seek to predetermine issues that can only be reached through negotiations. In this regard the United States has opposed, and will continue to oppose, settlement activity in territories occupied in 1967 which remain an obstacle to peace.” **US Letter of Assurances to the Palestinians on the terms of the Madrid Peace Conference excerpts – October 24, 1991**

“Every time I have gone to Israel in connection with the peace process on each of my trips I have been met with the announcement of new settlement activity. This does violate United States policy. It is the first thing that Arabs--Arab governments—the first thing that Palestinians in the territories—whose situation is really quite desperate—the first thing they raise when we talk to them. I don’t think there is any greater obstacle to peace than settlement activity that continues not only unabated but at an advanced pace.” **U.S. Secretary of State James Baker – May 22, 1991**

When President Bush was asked about Baker’s criticism of Israel’s settlement policy, he told reporters, “Secretary Baker was speaking for this administration, and I strongly support what he said. . .It would make a big contribution to peace if these settlements would stop. That’s what the secretary was trying to say. . .and I’m one hundred percent for him.”

“My position is that the foreign policy of the United States says we do not believe there should be new settlements in the West Bank or in East Jerusalem. And I will conduct that policy as if it’s firm, which it is, and I will be shaped in whatever decisions we make to see whether people can comply with that policy. And that’s our strongly held view.” **President George H.W. Bush, press conference – March 3, 1990**

"Since the end of the 1967 war, the U.S. has regarded Israel as the occupying power in the occupied territories, which includes the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. The U.S. considers Israel's occupation to be governed by the Hague Regulations of 1907 and the 1949 Geneva Conventions concerning the protection of civilian populations under military occupation." **Thomas Pickering, US Ambassador to the United Nations – November 27, 1989**

### **The Reagan Administration**

In Reagan’s view, Israeli settlement was not illegal, but merely “ill-advised” and “unnecessarily provocative.”

“The Reagan Plan states that ‘the United States will not support the use of any additional land for the purpose of settlements during the transition period (5 years after Palestinian election for a self-governing authority). Indeed, the immediate adoption of a settlements freeze by Israel, more than any other action, could create the confidence needed for wider participation in these talks. Further settlement activity is in no way necessary for the security of Israel and only diminishes the confidence of the Arabs that a final outcome can be free and fairly negotiated.” **Reagan Plan – September 1982**

### **The Carter Administration**

“Our position on the settlements is very clear. We do not think they are legal.” **President Carter – April 1980 interview**

"U.S. Policy toward the establishment of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories is unequivocal and has long been a matter of public record. We consider it to be contrary to international law and an impediment to the successful conclusion of the Middle East peace process...Article 49, paragraph 6, of the Fourth Geneva Convention is, in my judgment, and has been in judgment of each of the legal advisors of the State Department for many, many years, to be...that [settlements] are illegal and that [the Convention] applies to the territories.” **Secretary of State Cyrus Vance before House Committee on Foreign Affairs – March 21, 1980**

### **The Ford Administration**

“Substantial resettlement of the Israeli civilian population in occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, is illegal under the convention and cannot be considered to have prejudged the outcome of future negotiations between the parties on the locations of the borders of states by the Middle East. Indeed, the presence of these settlements is seen by my government as an obstacle to the success of the negotiations for a just and final peace between Israel and its neighbors.” **William Scranton, US Ambassador to the United Nations, UN Security Council – March 23, 1976**

### **The Nixon Administration**

“The expropriation or confiscation of land, the construction of housing on such land, the demolition or confiscation of buildings, including those having historic or religious significance, and the application of Israeli law to occupied portions of the city are detrimental to our common interests in [Jerusalem]. The United States considers that the part of Jerusalem that came under the control of Israel in the June war, like other areas occupied by Israel, is governing the rights and obligations of an occupying Power. Among the provisions of international law which bind Israel, as they would bind any occupier, are the provisions that the occupier has no right to make changes in laws or in administration other than those which are temporarily necessitated by his security interests, and that an occupier may not confiscate or destroy private property. The pattern of behavior authorized under the Geneva Convention and international law is clear: the occupier must maintain the occupied area as intact and unaltered as possible, without interfering with the customary life of the area, and any changes must be necessitated by the immediate needs of the occupation.” **Charles Yost, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, UN Security Council – July 1, 1969**

### **The Johnson Administration**

“Although we have expressed our views to the Foreign Ministry and are confident there can be little doubt among GOI leaders as to our continuing opposition to any Israeli settlements in the occupied areas, we believe it would be timely and useful for the Embassy to restate in strongest terms the US position on this question.

You should refer to Prime Minister Eshkol's Knesset statement and our awareness of internal Israeli pressures for settling civilians in occupied areas. The GOI is aware of our continuing concern that nothing be done in the occupied areas which might prejudice the search for a peace settlement. By setting up civilian or quasi-civilian outposts in the occupied areas the GOI adds serious complications to the eventual task of drawing up a peace settlement. Further, the transfer of civilians to occupied areas, whether or not in settlements which are under military control, is contrary to Article 49 of the Geneva Convention, which states "The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies." " **Airgram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel,**" in Smith, Louis J. (Ed.). Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, V. 20, Arab-Israeli Dispute 1967-1968. DC: GPO, 2001.