



... Turning now to Israel, the Trump administration is reversing the Obama administration's approach towards Israeli settlements.

U.S. public statements on settlement activities in the West Bank have been inconsistent over decades. In 1978, the Carter administration categorically concluded that Israel's establishment of civilian settlements was inconsistent with international law. However, in 1981, President Reagan disagreed with that conclusion and stated that he didn't believe that the settlements were inherently illegal.

Subsequent administrations recognized that unrestrained settlement activity could be an obstacle to peace, but they wisely and prudently recognized that dwelling on legal positions didn't advance peace. However, in December 2016, at the very end of the previous administration, Secretary Kerry changed decades of this careful, bipartisan approach by publicly reaffirming the supposed illegality of settlements.

After carefully studying all sides of the legal debate, this administration agrees with President Reagan. The establishment of Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank is not per se inconsistent with international law.

I want to emphasize several important considerations.

First, look, we recognize that – as Israeli courts have – the legal conclusions relating to individual settlements must depend on an assessment of specific facts and circumstances on the ground. Therefore, the United States Government is expressing no view on the legal status of any individual settlement.

The Israeli legal system affords an opportunity to challenge settlement activity and assess humanitarian considerations connected to it. Israeli courts have confirmed the legality of certain settlement activities and has concluded that others cannot be legally sustained.

Second, we are not addressing or prejudging the ultimate status of the West Bank. This is for the Israelis and the Palestinians to negotiate. International law does not compel a particular outcome, nor create any legal obstacle to a negotiated resolution.

Third, the conclusion that we will no longer recognize Israeli settlements as per se inconsistent with international law is based on the unique facts, history, and circumstances presented by the establishment of civilian settlements in the West Bank. Our decision today does not prejudice or decide legal conclusions regarding situations in any other parts of the world.

And finally – finally – calling the establishment of civilian settlements inconsistent with international law hasn't worked. It hasn't advanced the cause of peace.

The hard truth is there will never be a judicial resolution to the conflict, and arguments about who is right and wrong as a matter of international law will not bring peace. This is a complex political problem that can only be solved by negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

The United States remains deeply committed to helping facilitate peace, and I will do everything I can to help this cause. The United States encourages the Israelis and the Palestinians to resolve the status of Israeli settlements in the West Bank in any final status negotiations.

And further, we encourage both sides to find a solution that promotes, protects the security and welfare of Palestinians and Israelis alike...

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