



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on January 10, 2014

## Israel Unveils Plan for New Homes in West Bank

Israel's housing ministry [published plans](#) on January 10 to build 1,400 new housing units in settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

In response to the announcement, Saeb Erekat, the chief Palestinian negotiator, said, "Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu sent a message to Mr. Kerry today, and the message reads: Do not continue your peace efforts.... They know very well that this destroys the peace process."



Erekat negotiated the Oslo Accords with Israel and was the Palestinians' chief negotiator from 1995 until May 2003, when he resigned in protest from the Palestinian government. He later reconciled with the party and was reappointed to the position in September 2003. He also serves as a member of the Palestinian Parliament, representing Jericho.

Secretary of State [John Kerry left Israel](#) on January 6 after his five-day visit to the region, during which he met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

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Following his meeting with the two leaders, Kerry said of his attempts to facilitate the peace process that the two sides were "not there yet, but we are making progress and we are beginning to flesh out the toughest hurdles yet to be overcome."

A spokesman for Abbas, Nabil Abu Rdeneh, condemned Israel's announcement of new housing, stating, "This decision demonstrates continued Israeli obstruction of U.S. efforts to create a path to peace based on a two-state solution."

A report from Bloomberg News noted that peace talks brokered by Secretary of State Kerry began in July and are scheduled to run for nine months. U.S. Ambassador to Israel Daniel Shapiro said on January 7 that Kerry hopes to propose a blueprint within a month that would guide negotiations toward a final treaty.

The *New York Times* reported that the new housing plan was also criticized within Israel and quoted Ofer Shelah, a member of Netanyahu's coalition from the centrist Yesh Atid Party, who called the announcement "regrettable both in content and in the timing."

The *Jerusalem Post* on January 10 quoted Israeli Finance Minister Yair Lapid, who said that the Yesh Atid Party he heads would do everything it could to block the building of the new housing units beyond the pre-1967 lines.

"These are not building tenders, but declarations to build that are void of content. It's a bad idea. Yesh Atid will do everything it can to ensure that it remains simply a bad idea and won't be executed."

The *Post* reported that all of the newly proposed settlements are located within the planned route of the security barrier and a number of them are close to the Green Line setting the pre-1967 border, with



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Ariel being the farthest beyond the line.

The Israeli West Bank security barrier currently under construction will be 430 miles long when complete. However, the barrier does not follow the Green Line exactly and according to the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, after the barrier's completion, 8.5 percent of the West Bank area will be on the Israeli side of the barrier. Israel has argued that the barrier is necessary to protect Israeli civilians from Palestinian terrorism, which considering the violent nature of organizations such as the PLO is a valid concern. Those opposed to the barrier, however, counter that the barrier is an illegal attempt to annex Palestinian land under the guise of security, and a violation of international law.

A press release issued by the International Court of Justice on July 9, 2004 entitled "Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory," stated this opinion: "The construction of the wall being built by Israel, the occupying Power, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, and its associated régime, are contrary to international law."

Peace Now, an Israeli group that opposes settlements, said in a statement, "These actions are an indication that this government is not serious about the process, in fact they are fooling the Israeli public, the Palestinian leadership, the U.S. Secretary of State and the international community."

The *Times* cited a statement made by a senior Israeli official, who insisted on anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly, who said, "Israel is strictly honoring all the understandings that were reached to facilitate the current peace talks. If you look at every peace plan that's been on the table, there are differences between the different plans, but in all of them, the large settlement blocs remain part of the final-status peace. If you're building in areas that are going to remain part of Israel in any agreement, are we really changing the map of peace?"

The new settlements planned by Israel will be in Gush Etzion (shown), south of Jerusalem in the West Bank; Ramat Shlomo, in northern East Jerusalem; and Ariel, in the central West Bank, 12 miles east of the Green Line dividing Israel from the West Bank area captured during the 1967 Six Day War.

In November 1967, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 242, which called for Israel to withdraw "from territories occupied in the recent conflict." But in 1980, Israel's parliament, the Knesset, passed the Jerusalem Law, which declared that "Jerusalem, complete and united, is the capital of Israel." In turn, the law was declared "null and void" by UN Security Council Resolution 478.

The dispute has never been settled. Palestinians seek to establish a state in the West Bank, with East Jerusalem as its capital. They fear Israeli settlements will deny them a viable country.

Aside from border disputes between the two factions, the peace process in Palestine is hampered by the fact that Mahmoud Abbas is not a credible leader to represent the legitimate interests of the Palestinian people. Former PLO head Yasser Arafat appointed Abbas as prime minister of the Palestinian Authority (PA) on March 19, 2003. Abbas became the chairman of the PLO on November 11, 2004 upon the death of Arafat and became president of the PA on January 15, 2005. When Arafat was elected as president of the PA in a landslide victory in 1996, both Israel and the United States refused to negotiate with him because of his past terrorist connections.

Many Palestinian people were displaced from their homelands following the creation of Israel in 1948 and have suffered much economic hardship. However, before successful negotiations to establish a homeland for these people can be established, Palestinians must be governed by moderate individuals who can coexist alongside Israel as a peaceful and prosperous neighbor.



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Mahmoud Abbas, because of his past PLO association with the radical Yasser Arafat, lacks sufficient credibility with the West to fulfill that role. If the Palestinians are serious about establishing a sovereign state, they must find leadership that is non-threatening to Israel and then serious negotiations can begin.

*Photo of Gush Etzion settlement in the West Bank*



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