

THE RESUMPTION OF CONSTRUCTION IN THE SETTLEMENTS THREATENS THE SECURITY OF ISRAEL

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The government of Mr. Netanyahu has yielded to its most radical wing once again by ending the moratorium on settlement. To be sure, the debate has often been poorly understood and slanted in Europe, because it does not involve, for the most part – at least at this stage – building new settlements or really extending the territory of existing ones but of building inside them in order to deal with demographic growth. We also note that this announcement did not unleash the cement mixers and bulldozers in the settlements, which have reckoned on benefiting from this decision. Nonetheless, **the option chosen was a bad one.**

It is bad, because, without political need, **Palestinians will dig their heels in** less than two weeks after the resumption of direct negotiations.

It is bad, because once again it allows the enemies of Israel to hold the Jewish State up to public obloquy.

It is bad, because it sends a bad signal: everyone knows that the peace will only be made via a territorial arrangement which, although painful for both parties, is the price to pay. **Mr. Netanyahu has just shown that he either does not understand Palestinian sensitivity in this regard or that he has no cure. This is a strategic, political and moral mistake.**

Stephan Juffa, the director of *Metula News Agency*, which one can hardly consider to be an enemy of Israel, has very correctly written this morning: *‘The decision not to extend the freeze has just given us a cruel reminder that it is a coalition of the Right, the Extreme Right and the Edenists which holds power in Jerusalem. This is so much the worse for the overwhelming majority of us who, according to opinion polls taken these past few years, are subjected to a policy which we do not share...’*

We have no intention, nor do we pretend here and now to define what criteria could make it possible for a peace to be reached. The situation is complex, as I was just reminded by many Israeli and Palestinian friends who met several days ago during a study trip arranged by the **Interchange Project** for European experts on counter-terrorism. One of our interlocutors, professor **Shlomo Avineri**, who was General Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the government of Yitzhak Rabin, believes that what is most important is not to negotiate immediately the major topics which have undermined the whole peace process for the past fifteen years – the settlements, the lines of borders, the status of Jerusalem, the ‘Jewish’

nature of the State of Israel –but to **resume a dialogue which has been interrupted for too long and to deal with it in a modest way by seeking to make a little progress and, above all, by taking the time to establish mutual confidence, without which no peace will be possible.** He is right.

The decision by Mr. Netanyahu clearly is not headed in this direction. Was Stephan Juffa correct when he wrote: *‘This government will not make peace’*? Obviously, we hope not. But in any case, it is certain that **so long as it yields to the ultra-religious and to the supporters of its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Liebermann, the majority of Israelis will continue to be held hostage to the 10% of their compatriots who have opted for the settlements.** Moreover, many of these settlers are without doubt there for economic reasons: choosing to live in a habitat which is clearly less expensive than within the legal borders of Israel.

A minority has yet again raised the risk of destroying the image of the State of Israel and of endangering the fragile prospects of peace in which we may still hope.

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