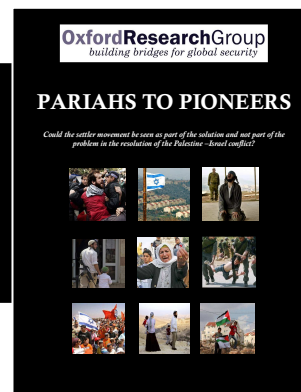


Leading Think-Tank Oxford Research Group releases Report:

PARIAHS TO PIONEERS

Could the settler movement be part of the solution and not part of the problem in the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?



In light of the current proximity talks mediated by Special Envoy George Mitchell, a new report by Oxford Research Group on the Israeli settler movement is very timely. ORG examines the possibility – counterintuitive at first glance – that the settlers, now seen as “pariahs” by some, can become the next generation of “pioneers” who forge the infrastructure of Israel’s future.

This ORG study aims to reframe the debate on security. **Daniel Kurtzer**, former US Ambassador to Israel, argues that “*the settler community will need an enhanced sense of security in order to assimilate the idea of evacuating large parts of the West Bank. This is a stunning conclusion,*” he writes, “*for one of the earliest rationales for the settlements – long proven not to be the case – is that the settlements themselves were supposed to enhance security for Israelis.*”

Settler groups are not homogenous, argues Former British Foreign Secretary **Sir Malcolm Rifkind**: “*Most of the world thinks of settlers as right-wing ideologues committed to a Greater Israel. The settler issue is much more complex and diverse than is normally assumed. Almost a third of the settlers are ultra-orthodox Jews, many of whom reject or are indifferent to Zionism, and who have been attracted to the West Bank because of the availability of low-cost housing for very large families. Such communities could be tempted back to Israel if the financial incentives were generous.*”

“*A strategic recalculation may be essential for Israel’s long-term security interests,*” writes **Gabrielle Rifkind**, Director of ORG Middle East Programme. “*In the current conflict environment,*” says Rifkind, “*fear and insecurity are predominant emotions that shape people’s attitudes. The image of the settlers is one of strident provocation. The motives of the settler movement are multiple and complex and real security would involve addressing the fears of these communities and help them reintegrate back into Israel.*”

By examining these issues dispassionately, and as a result of interviews with the settler movement, ORG is launching what could become, according to Kurtzer “*one of the most important processes necessary to achieve peace, namely, an internal dialogue and reckoning among settlers about their own future and the future of the State of Israel*”. The report makes the following **recommendations**:

1. The current proximity talks, which will end in September, will need to **define the new borders**. This will give clarity as to which settlements will fall within the borders of a new Palestinian state, and therefore who will need to be relocated.
2. The Olmert government created an **evacuation-compensation bill** in order to incentivize settlers to return within 1967 borders. This was never passed. The report suggests that this could be an important incentive for settlers. The international community could encourage the Israeli government to implement this.
3. **A Transitional Peace Fund** could be established by the international community to create momentum for settlers to relocate. The Jewish Diaspora can play an important role in supporting such a fund.
4. Settlers could be incentivized to be part of **planning new communities** in the Galilee and the Negev and not to repeat the lessons of Gaza in which communities were broken up and traumatised.
5. Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad’s remarks in 2009 that **settlers are welcome to stay in a future Palestinian state** are explored in terms of how realistic it is for some Israelis to reside in a new state of Palestine but retain Israeli citizenship, or the possibility of dual citizenship with reciprocal arrangements for the Palestinians.

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