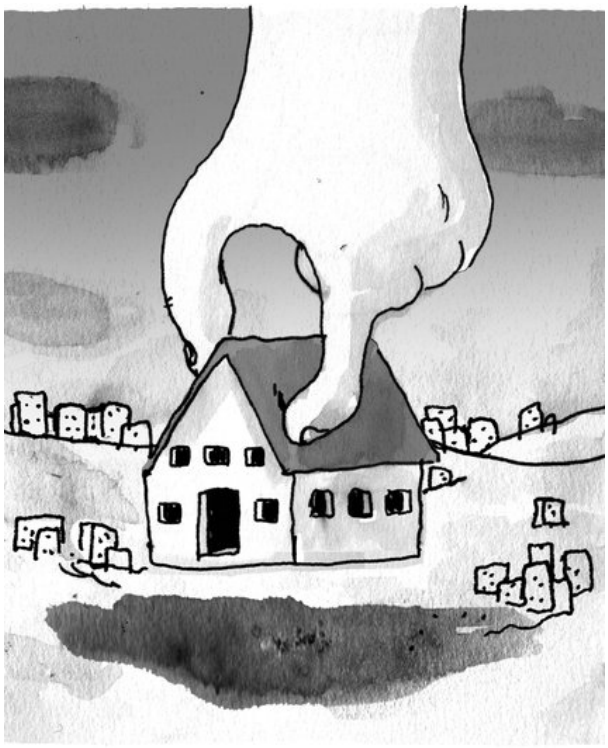
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At the Boiling Point With Israel

By **THE EDITORIAL BOARD** OCT. 6, 2016



Victor Kerlow

If the aim of the Israeli government is to prevent a peace deal with the Palestinians, now or in the future, it's close to realizing that goal. Last week, it approved the construction of a new Jewish settlement in the West Bank, another step in the steady march under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to build on land needed to create a Palestinian state.

The Obama administration, with every justification, strongly condemned the action as a betrayal of the idea of a two-state solution in the Middle East. But Mr. Netanyahu obviously doesn't care what Washington thinks, so it will

be up to President Obama to find another way to preserve that option before he leaves office.

The best idea under discussion now would be to have the United Nations Security Council, in an official resolution, lay down guidelines for a peace agreement covering such issues as Israel's security, the future of Jerusalem, the fate of Palestinian refugees and borders for both states. The United Nations previously laid down principles for a peace deal in Resolution 242 (1967) and Resolution 338 (1973); a new one would be more specific and take into account current realities. Another, though weaker, option is for Mr. Obama to act unilaterally and articulate this framework for the two parties.

The new settlement, which would consist of up to 300 homes, is one of a string of housing developments that would nearly divide the West Bank. It is designed to house settlers from a nearby illegal outpost, called Amona, which an Israeli court has ordered demolished because it is built on private, Palestinian-owned land.

In a statement, the State Department denounced the new construction plan, saying it would create a "significant new settlement" so deep into the West Bank that it would be "far closer to Jordan than Israel." It said the project would "effectively divide the West Bank and make the possibility of a viable Palestinian state more remote" and contradicts earlier Israeli government assurances that it would block more settlements.

A failure to freeze settlements has long been at the center of tensions between successive American administrations and Israel. This latest decision was especially insulting, coming just a few weeks after the United States and Israel concluded a defense agreement guaranteeing Israel $38 billion in military aid over 10 years. If the new settlement was known earlier, it might have affected those negotiations. Theoretically, the aid gives the United States leverage over Israel, but various administrations have been loath to exercise it; the first President George Bush withheld $400 million in loan guarantees from Israel in 1990 over the settlement issue. The move was later assumed to have been one factor in his re-election defeat.

However important weapons and military assistance are, the best chance of improving Israel's security lies in reaching a comprehensive peace agreement with the Palestinians. The ever expanding settlements have poisoned Palestinian hopes and functioned variously as a spark, a target and an excuse for violence, intensifying the conflict.

Mr. Netanyahu, however, feels no real pressure to halt the construction. Certainly not from the Palestinians, who are divided under a weak leader. Certainly not from Arab states like Saudi Arabia, which have shown little real commitment to Palestinian statehood and now are forging business and intelligence ties with Israel, a former enemy that is now a thriving economic and technological hub.

The most plausible pressure would come from Mr. Obama's leading the Security Council to put its authority behind a resolution to support a two-state solution and offer the outlines of what that could be. That may seem like a bureaucratic response unlikely to change anything, but it is the kind of political pressure Mr. Netanyahu abhors and has been working assiduously to prevent.

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