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PALESTINE-ISRAEL: Obama's Final Days

American presidents have more than once used their final days in office to make crucial decisions regarding Israel/Palestine. Ronald Reagan recognized the PLO in 1988. Bill Clinton issued the Clinton Parameters in 2000. If President Barack Obama intends to salvage some of his legacy as power transitions from the Democrats to the Republicans, he has a number of options.

The simplest, most powerful, and least destructive measure would be an explicit reaffirmation of the illegality of any form of Israeli sovereignty beyond the 1967 line, including East Jerusalem.

Such a reaffirmation must not enshrine the prospects of future land swaps. Adding such caveats risks legitimizing settlements that already exist and leaves vague the illegality of further settlement expansion.

Another powerful measure would be for Obama to recognize the State of Palestine without any qualifications that might imperil the rights of Palestinian refugees under international law or compromise the rights and status of Palestinian citizens of Israel.

The steps above must also be accompanied by measures that assign a degree of accountability to ensure the US does not reward Israeli actions that conflict with American policies, including settlement building. Such measures could include trade agreements that [differentiate](#) between goods and services emerging from the occupied territories and those produced in Israel proper.

President Obama could also take more subtle measures that would prove more effective than grand gestures. These actions might include supporting Palestinian, Israeli and American civil society that is rooted in values of equality and justice, such as by challenging legislation that seeks to criminalize nonviolent forms of protest and solidarity with the Palestinian cause in the US.

*“Subtle
measures
might be
better than
grand
gestures.”*

Other measures, such as a declaration of parameters or a UN resolution reaffirming the two-state solution, would be ill-advised. These would reinforce the power disparity between Israel and the Palestinians, water down Palestinian rights, and likely be biased toward Israel in order to preempt an expected political backlash.

Secretary of State John Kerry has already [underscored the dangers](#) of Israel's continued expansion of its settlement enterprise, as have [leading analysts](#). President Obama is now in a powerful position to challenge this trajectory and to align America with the quest for equality and rights.

POLICY OPTIONS

- Explicitly reaffirm illegality of Israeli sovereignty beyond Green Line – without caveats.
- Recognize the State of Palestine
- Support Palestinian and Israeli civil society efforts rooted in equality and justice.

*“Assign accountability to
actions that conflict with
US policy”*