

Israel's obligations under Road Map

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Madam, – I find the argument of Edwin Bennatan (Opinion, March 29th), quite alarming. It is full of unfounded allegations aimed at helping Israel out of isolation of its own making.

Israel refuses to fulfil its obligations under the Road Map to freeze all settlement activity so that negotiations for a two-state solution can begin and it has been caught red-handed forging other countries' passports.

On the issue of Annapolis, I wrote soon after that meeting: “The meeting in Annapolis on November 27th, 2007 could have been a major turning point in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle but unfortunately it looks as if it may turn out to be yet another missed opportunity”.

Our president, Mr Abbas, tried his best to make Annapolis historic in terms of ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The meeting concluded with an agreement to try to reach a peaceful settlement by the end of 2008. Ehud Olmert, then Israeli prime minister, promised at that meeting to implement the Road Map, which obliged Israel to freeze its settlement activities, to release Palestinian detainees and to dismantle the check points.

But, contrary to his promises, in an effort to keep his precarious coalition intact, which all Israeli prime ministers put first, Mr Olmert approved a decision to build more than 300 housing units in Har Homa, an illegal settlement on occupied Palestinian land. Also, Israel detained more Palestinians and increased its check points.

On the issue of settlements, Mr Bennatan failed to mention the real number (1,600) of the housing units approved, while the American vice president, Joe Biden, was in Israel and never hinted at the 50,000 units in the pipeline.

Israel continues to build settlements in breach of the 4th Geneva Convention, which forbids an occupying power from transferring its citizens into the territory it occupies. It continues to build settlements despite Security Council demands in resolutions 446, 452 and 465 that it cease building and remove the existing ones. And it maintains its annexation of East Jerusalem contrary to Security Council demands in resolutions 252, 267, 271, 298, 476 and 478 that it reverse this annexation. It is time that the Security Council took concrete measures to ensure that its resolutions are obeyed.

The Arab initiative endorsed at the Arab summit meeting in Beirut in 2002 is still on the table waiting for Israel's hopefully favourable response. This initiative states that all Arab and Muslim countries are ready to normalise relations with Israel in return for its withdrawal from the Arab territories conquered by Israel in the course of the 1967 war.

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