

## [Senate Again Undermines Obama's Middle-East Peace Efforts](#)

It is hard to get excited about defeating Republican challengers when incumbent Democrats embrace the same right-wing foreign policy.

Once again, as President [Barack Obama](#) began pressuring the right-wing Israeli government to freeze the expansion of its illegal settlements in occupied Palestinian territories, leading Congressional [Democrats](#) have joined in with [Republicans](#) to try to stop him.

Recognizing that increased Israeli colonization on occupied Palestinian land would seriously threaten the viability of an independent Palestinian state that could emerge from the peace talks and thereby make the process worthless, and recognizing that he would lose any popular mandate to continue negotiations under such conditions, Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas has threatened to withdraw from the negotiating table. As a result, Obama has been trying to get the rightist Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu to extend the partial freeze on new construction of the Jewish-only settlements in the occupied West Bank.

In an apparent effort to undermine administration's efforts, Democratic Senators Barbara Boxer and Robert Casey joined with Republican Senators Johnny Isakson and Richard Burr in preparing a letter to President Obama that criticizes Abbas' threat to withdraw from the talks while completely ignoring the threatened resumption of Netanyahu's illegal colonization drive that would prompt it. According to the letter, "...it is critical that all sides stay at the table. Neither side should make threats to leave just as the talks are getting started."

There is no mention in the letter that Netanyahu should abide by commitments of previous Israeli governments to freeze the settlement drive nor is there any mention of the five UN Security Council resolutions and the 2004 World Court decision calling on Israel to withdraw from the already-existing settlements. Instead, they praise the right wing prime minister for "not abandon(ing) the talks."

It appears that Boxer and the other initiators of the letter decided that rather than emphasize the importance of both sides refraining from taking actions that would undermine the credibility of the negotiations, they were determined to put the [U.S. Senate](#) on record putting all the blame for the possible collapse of the talks on the Palestinians and none on the Israelis.

In response to international calls for pressure on Israel to live up to its international legal obligations to withdraw from Palestinian territories seized in the June 1967 war in return for security guarantees, the letter also insists that the United States "not to attempt to impose an agreement on the two parties," and -- despite the gross asymmetry in power between the Israeli occupiers and the Palestinians under occupation -- that a peace settlement must be "embraced by both sides."

The letter was strongly criticized by the liberal Zionist group Americans for Peace Now and praised by the right-wing American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC.)

Back in April, Boxer and Isakson initiated another letter, which was signed by 76 senators (half of whom were Democrats), to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton implicitly rebuking President Obama for challenging Israel on its illegal settlements, insisting that "differences are best resolved amicably and in a manner that befits longstanding strategic allies." The letter, which criticized the Palestinians for conditioning talks on a settlement freeze, insisted that "Progress occurs in the Middle East when everyone knows there is simply no space between the U.S. and Israel."

Ironically, despite the efforts of senators like Boxer, Russ Feingold, Patty Murray and others who have signed such letters to undermine President Obama's peace efforts in the Middle East, liberal groups like Democracy for America and MoveOn have recently been praising Boxer, Feingold, Murray, and other signatories as "progressive heroes" deserving support for their re-election