

The Miliband Thunderclap:

Potential Implications of Declaring Israel's Occupation Unlawful

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If a bloc of major countries imposed the full range of sanctions suggested by the UK foreign secretary's statement, the consequences for Israel—and the peace process—could be catastrophic.

On September 8, Foreign Secretary Ed Miliband announced the UK government's intention to ban imports from West Bank settlements, a move that drew immediate support from ten European countries and Canada. But the most important part of his speech attracted scant attention: that Britain would now view Israel's occupation as "unlawful." Turning nearly sixty years of diplomacy on its head, this pronouncement implied that Israeli security concerns regarding terrorism from the West Bank were irrelevant, that negotiations with the Palestinians should cover little more than withdrawal logistics, and that Israel can do nothing to satisfy Britain short of dismantling settlements and leaving the territories. If a bloc of major countries were to impose the full range of sanctions suggested by Miliband, the consequences for Israel—and the peace process—could be catastrophic.

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In this Policy Note, Institute Executive Director Robert Satloff makes clear that U.S. interests require limiting the damage from Miliband's announcement. But he also explains how U.S. efforts will likely fall short unless Israel helps its own cause through a diplomatic offensive centered on renouncing unilateral annexation of West Bank territory and reaffirming its commitment to a "just and lasting peace" with the Palestinians. ❖

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