**'Obama asks for 2-month W. Bank construction moratorium'**

In return, US will not demand extension, will commit to UN Security Council vetos, weapon deliveries and presence of Israeli forces in Jordan Valley says David Makovsky of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

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US President Barack Obama has requested Israel extend the West Bank settlement construction moratorium by only two months. In return the US "will not ask for a moratorium extension beyond sixty days," according to David Makovsky from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a close associate to Dennis Ross and Obama's Middle East adviser, Army Radio reported Thursday.

"According to senior US officials," wrote Makovsky on Wednesday, the Obama administration's efforts to extend the construction freeze "culminated in a draft letter negotiated with Israeli defense minister Ehud Barak and chief Israeli peace negotiator Yitzhak Molcho, and ultimately sent from President Obama's desk to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu."

Makovsky, director of the Project on the Middle East Peace Process, explains that, "At its core, the letter offers a string of assurances to Israel in return for a two-month moratorium extension. More specifically, US officials indicate that the document makes commitments on issues ranging from current peace and security matters to future weapons deliveries in the event that peace-related security arrangements are reached."

The letter commits the US to veto any UN Security Council proposal regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the coming year. In addition, Washington will not object to the request of leaving Israeli forces in the Jordan Valley for a prolonged duration.

"Regarding policy issues," Makovsky writes, "the letter guarantees that Washington will not ask for a moratorium extension beyond sixty days. Rather, the future of settlements is to be settled at the table as part of territorial negotiations."

"Second," Makovsky continues, "the letter promises that the United States will veto any UN Security Council initiative -- Arab or otherwise -- relating to Arab-Israeli peace during the agreed one-year negotiating period."

"Third, Washington pledged to accept the legitimacy of existing Israeli security needs and not seek to redefine them," says Makovsky. "In this context, the letter explicitly mentions the need to ensure a complete ban on the smuggling of rockets, mortars, arms, and related items, as well as the infiltration of terrorists into Israel."

Addressing Israeli forces in the Jordan Valley, Makovsky continues, "the letter offers to help maintain a transitional period for Jordan Valley security that is longer than any other aspect of a negotiated peace -- an apparent allusion to keeping Israeli troops in that region for an extended period of time."

Regarding future weapon deals, Makovsky writes that "the letter explicitly discusses the need to enhance Israel's defense capabilities in the event that the parties reach security arrangements. Even if a security deal fails to materialize, Washington's offer creates the baseline for Israel's defense needs in a post-peace era."