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# OPINION

## U.S. support has allowed Israel to violate Palestinian rights repeatedly

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The surprising victory of the Islamic Party Hamas in Palestinian elections was due in part to the corruption of the ruling Fatah Party.

But many Palestinians rejected Fatah because, despite its moderation, it failed to gain recognition of Palestinian rights from Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, whose hard-line advertisement

policies undercut Fatah's credibility with Palestinians and gave Hamas a boost.

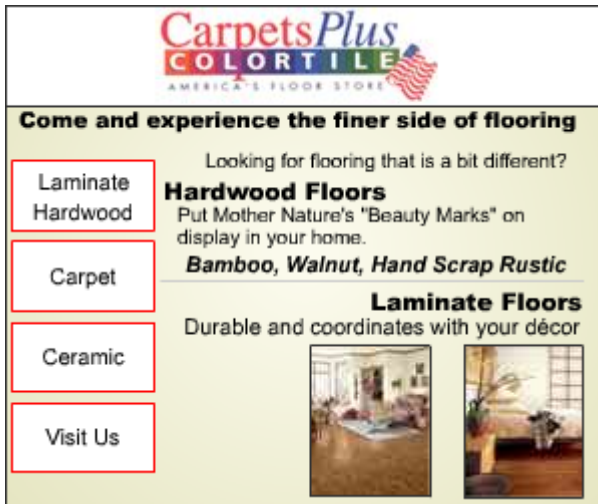
When Sharon suffered a severe stroke in early January, many U.S. and Israeli politicians and journalists claimed Sharon was the best chance for Israeli-Palestinian peace. He had



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removed troops and 8,500 Jewish settlers from Israeli-occupied Gaza, as well as hundreds more settlers from four small settlements in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian West Bank.

Columnist Jim Hoagland wrote Jan. 11 in the Star that Sharon's "daring" seemed to promise "significant unilateral withdrawals from the West Bank." Columnist Paul Greenberg, writing in Jan. 13 in the Star, saw Sharon as having "gambled on peace." Both writers blamed Palestinians for the impasse.

Reality differs. Since the Oslo Accords of 1993, Palestinian leaders have been willing to accept a West Bank-Gaza Palestinian State on 22 percent of Palestine/Israel — the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

Sharon refused to negotiate a final settlement with either Yasser Arafat or Mahmoud Abbas. Instead, he continued Israel's seizure of Palestinian land and water resources for the expansion of Jewish settlements in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian West Bank. During 2004, the number of settlers in the West Bank grew by 14,000 — more than the number taken out of Gaza. There are now 400,000 settlers in the West Bank, which includes Arab East Jerusalem.

The existence of settlers, the settlements, and the confiscation of resources are all illegal under international law, namely the Fourth Geneva Convention and U.N. resolutions. The United States, however, has refused to pressure Israel to remove the settlements. Financial, military and diplomatic support from the United States has enabled Israel to grossly violate the human rights of Palestinian Muslims and Christians.

B'tselem, Israel's leading human- rights group, reported that during the 1990s Israel violated 29 of the 30 Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in its treatment of

Palestinians under Israeli occupation. Among violations (some war crimes): torture, collective punishment, destruction of thousands of homes and tens of thousands of fruit trees, killing of civilians, and confiscation of land and water resources ([www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org)).

In 2005 alone, Amnesty International deplored Israel's unwillingness to stop settler violence against Palestinians; Human Rights Watch accused Israel of failing to protect Palestinian civilians from unlawful attacks by Israeli soldiers; and the European Union criticized Israel's violations of the rights of 200,000 Palestinians living in East Jerusalem ([www.aiusa.org](http://www.aiusa.org); [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)).

Human Rights Watch condemned the separation wall that Israel is building, since 80 percent of it is in the West Bank rather than on the Israel-West Bank border where the wall would have equally protected Israel from terrorism, been cheaper to build, and legal.

The International Court of Justice has declared the West Bank portions of the wall illegal. The wall limits or denies hundreds of thousands of Palestinians access to jobs, agricultural lands, hospitals, schools, families and friends — even water.

Palestinians trapped on the Israeli side of the wall must obtain special permits from Israel to reside in their own homes.

Washington's support for Israel's occupation and gradual takeover of Palestinian lands prevents the creation of a viable Palestinian state and a just and lasting peace, strengthens hawks and weakens doves on both sides, and means more needless Israeli and Palestinian deaths.

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