

Israel has taken control of a large chunk of land near a prominent West Bank settlement, paving the way for the possible construction of 2,500 settlement homes, officials said Monday, in a new challenge to Mideast peacemaking.

Successive Israeli governments have broken promises to the United States to halt settlement expansion, defined by Washington as an obstacle to peace. Ongoing expansion is likely to create friction not only with the Palestinians, but with President Barack Obama, whose Mideast envoy, George Mitchell, has long pushed for a settlement freeze. Obama has said he'd get involved quickly in Mideast peace efforts.

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