

REPORT ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENT IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

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CAN ISRAEL ACCEPT THE PRICE OF PEACE

By Geoffrey Aronson

On the face of it Israel's leadership has come a long way during forty years of occupation. In the aftermath of its 1967 victory, successive Israeli governments adopted a policy of "deciding not to decide" the future of the conquered West Bank and Gaza Strip. Under government protection, the system of settlements was set in motion.

Prime Minister Menachem Begin, even as he recognized the "legitimate right of the Palestinian peoples and their just requirements" in the Camp David Accords and committed (half-heartedly) to a three-month settlement freeze, made no secret his annexationist preferences, calling the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip "Arabs of the Land of Israel," and "thickening" existing settlements. Together with then-minister of agriculture Ariel Sharon, and with young Likudniks like Ehud Olmert cheering in the background, Begin championed a new and expanded settlement enterprise.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin shook the hand of Palestine Liberation Organization chairman Yasser Arafat and recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people, but he presided over the largest-ever expansion of the West Bank settler population and inaugurated wide-ranging changes in the West Bank's infrastructure that bound settlements more closely to Israel.

Ariel Sharon is the only prime minister ever to have acted on the principle that Israel's security could be *improved* by the evacuation of Gaza settlements. Israel's "disengagement" from Gaza in 2005 did not end its occupation of Palestinian territory, even in the Gaza Strip. But the retreat from Gaza signaled that the policy of deciding not to decide had exhausted itself.

On his recent return from the Annapolis summit, Prime Minister Olmert suggested that if the "two state solution collapses, the State of Israel is finished." As Uri Avneri, a longtime campaigner against occupation, noted, "Nobody in the peace camp has yet dared to go as far as that."

The significance of Olmert's declaration is clear. His remarks suggest an awareness that Israel's policy of permanent settlement and occupation, nurtured by all Israeli leaders since 1967, is untenable, precisely because it threatens Israel's character as a Jewish, democratic state.

The importance of this realization should not be underestimated, but neither should it be exaggerated. Olmert's recognition that a problem exists is a

vital prerequisite to remedial action—in this case Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories and the creation of a sovereign and independent Palestinian state—but it is far from clear that Olmert, who appears to accept this solution in principle, has internalized the price of its realization.

The resurrection of the road map, minus the Israeli reservations associated with its maiden appearance in 2003, promises renewed attention to a settlement freeze, evacuation of settlement outposts, and a campaign by reformed Palestinian forces against Hamas. The original plan was stillborn because it failed to establish a broad political horizon in which difficult decisions on settlements and security could be made and implemented. The Annapolis process includes a parallel and welcome commitment to negotiate a final status agreement. Meanwhile, Israel's bureaucratic and political settlement machine nurtured during the last four decades grinds on, notwithstanding Olmert's reaffirmation of Israel's previous, unfulfilled commitments to freeze settlement expansion and dismantle new settlements.

Ha'aretz reported on November 26 that "according to the Israeli government sources, the Americans asked Israel whether it preferred to announce a settlement freeze or outpost evacuations. 'Of the two, a settlement freeze is easier than evacuating the outposts, because this only involves a *declaration*,

West Bank Settlers Residing
East of the Barrier: 65,440
West Bank Settlers Residing
West of the Barrier: 209,716

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TO OUR READERS

For decades, diplomats have proposed a “freeze” of Israeli settlement activity to create confidence that settlements will eventually be evacuated through negotiations for a two state peace. Yet all efforts to “freeze” settlements, including the Road Map first launched in 2003, have failed. As we report in this issue, expansion of settlements in the West Bank and the Jerusalem area continues, even after Olmert and Abbas agreed at the Annapolis peace conference to resurrect the Road Map.

The rationale for a settlement freeze sounds persuasive. It would signal Israeli support for ending most settlements and for a Palestinian state with agreed borders that settlements now foreclose. If settlements were frozen, Palestinian despair and advocacy by extremists of violent rebellion could give way to hope and popular support for negotiations. On the other hand, negotiations and peace will fail if the current pattern of settlement expansion that shows an intention to annex large areas of the West Bank, continues, leaving Palestinians with fragments of land, not a viable state.

The concept of a comprehensive settlement freeze is that it could be done with a stroke of a pen, without prejudging the outcome of peace talks. That is an illusion. In their powerful new book *Lords of the Land, the War over Israel's Settlements in the Occupied Territories*, Akiva Eldar and Edith Zertal describe how a dedicated, politically sophisticated settler movement has made settlements Israel's national project over the

past 40 years. Today, the settlement apparatus is deeply entrenched in the Israeli bureaucracy, army, police, security services, and even parts of the judiciary. It now operates virtually on “auto-pilot,” irrespective of the wishes of the majority of Israelis, who are fed up with the settlement venture, or even senior political leaders. A settlement freeze would have to break the grip of the settler lobby and the powerful machine it has created. It would require strong leadership and a major shift in Israel's dysfunctional politics and sweeping changes in the bureaucracy in which settlers hold disproportionate power. The settlement lobby would fight a freeze no less bitterly than a decision to withdraw from most settlements altogether, which a freeze would imply. Moreover, if a freeze dominates the negotiating agenda this would likely stall talks on evacuating settlements and could waste years while the settlement machine moves forward. No Israeli leader, much less Ehud Olmert, who presides over a weak coalition, would be prepared to call for an end to settlements, with minor border adjustments, of the kind needed for a two state peace. Only strong, unprecedented, and sustained American leadership that calls for, not just a freeze, but an evacuation of most settlements, could embolden an Israeli leader to do this.



The British government's position on settlements is clear and known. We oppose them.

The responsibility of the two sides in the first stage of the road plan is also known. Therefore, all parties must adhere to their obligations. It is important that the two sides implement their obligations. Stopping settlement activity and reopening Fatah institutions in Jerusalem are part of the Israeli commitments under the road map.

**British Foreign Secretary David Miliband,
as reported in an interview in *Al-Quds*, November 19, 2007**

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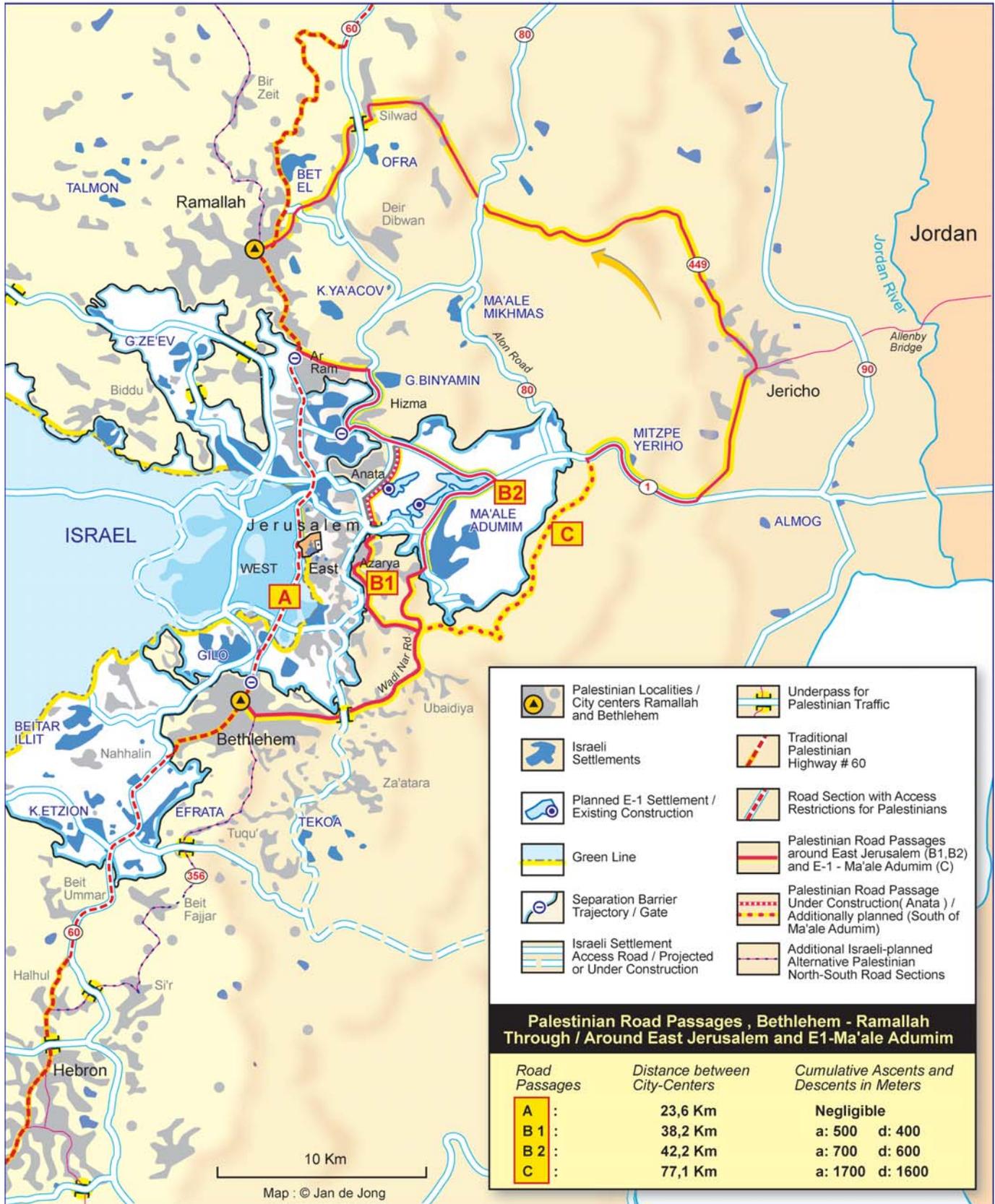
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Israeli-planned Palestinian Road Passages Around Jerusalem



SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

July 6 Settler activists accuse border police of firing shots in their direction as they attempted to establish a settlement outpost near the Hashmonaim settlement. (Arutz 7)

July 10 *Ma'ariv* reports that housing sales in the West Bank increased by 38 percent from January through May 2007.

The *Jerusalem Post* reports a Defense Ministry assessment that legal challenges to the route of the separation barrier might prevent its completion before 2010.

July 15 Palestinians throw stones at and injure a settler driving on bypass Road 443 near Ramallah. (OCHA)

July 16 Residents from the settlement of Otni'el uproot about 100 nearby olive trees in preparation for expansion. (OCHA)

Settlers assault and injure a 77-year-old Palestinian man from Deir Istiya, Qalqilya, on his way to his land. (OCHA)

Settlers from Kiryat Arba assault and injure a 12-year-old Palestinian boy from Hebron. (OCHA)

July 17 The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) close the Beit Iba, Anabta, and Jit checkpoints (of Nablus, Tulkarm, and Qalqilya, respectively) as well as the segment of Road 60 stretching from the Shave Shomron checkpoint to Silat al-Dhahr to prevent settlers from marching to the evacuated settlement of Homesh. (OCHA)

July 24 Israel's High Court of Justice orders the IDF to dismantle the cement wall along Road 317 south of Mount Hebron within fourteen days. (*Ha'aretz*)

July 25 Israeli security forces clash with hundreds of settlers and activists near the Efrat settlement as they attempt to prevent the establishment of a settlement outpost. (*Ha'aretz*)

Israeli policemen evacuate hundreds of settlers from the ruins of the evacuated settlement of Homesh. (*Ha'aretz*)

July 26 *Ha'aretz* reports on the abduction and beating of a 13-year-old Palestinian boy by settlers from Shilo.

Clashes take place between Israeli police and marchers when hundreds of Gush Katif evacuees walk toward the evacuated settlements of Nisanit and Elei Sinai in the northern Gaza Strip. IDF forces retrieve four marchers who managed to cross the

border fence into the northern Gaza Strip. (Yediot Aharonot)

July 31 The IDF and police forcibly evict dozens of settlers squatting in the former settlement of Homesh. (Arutz 7)

Ha'aretz reports that 10 to 15 out of 450 registered Israeli organic farms are in West Bank settlements.

August 1 *Ha'aretz* reports that Israel has begun to implement a High Court of Justice ruling to dismantle a cement wall built by the IDF along Road 317 near Hebron.

August 2 Israel's High Court of Justice rejects a petition by Palestinian farmers against continued construction of the separation barrier around Gush Etzion. Permission was granted for the confiscation of 272 dunams of Palestinian farmland in the area. (Arutz 7)

Two settlers from the Mitzpeh Yair outpost, near Hebron, attack UN workers driving in the south Hebron Hills. (*Ha'aretz*)

August 4 Approximately 100 settlers spend the night in the ruins of the evacuated settlement of Homesh. (*Ha'aretz*)

August 7 At least 15 people are hurt as Israeli security forces evacuate more than 200 protestors and settlers from the wholesale market in Hebron. Hundreds of activists had barricaded themselves in three apartments there that an Israeli court had ordered evacuated. (*Ha'aretz*)

August 15 Israel's High Court of Justice rules that settlers who purchased homes in the Matityahu East neighborhood of the Modi'in Illit settlement from the bankrupt construction company Heftsiba will not be allowed to enter their houses until the court's final ruling on their status. (*Ha'aretz*)

The IDF begins leveling land, uprooting 200 trees belonging to Palestinian farmers in the al-Walaja village to prepare for the construction of the separation barrier near the settlement of Har Gilo. (OCHA)

August 17 More than 100 settler activists spend the weekend in the former settlement of Homesh and are evacuated by the IDF. (Arutz 7, OCHA)

August 18 At a Berlin grocery store, protestors demonstrate against Israeli products produced in the occupied territories. (*Ha'aretz*)

August 19 Settlers from the Gil'ad outpost, Nablus, set fire to 140 olive trees belonging to farmers from Jit, Qalqilya, and Tell, Nablus. (OCHA)

August 20 A Palestinian from Azzun village, Qalqilya, shoots into the settlement of Ma'ale Shomron, damaging some buildings. (Ma'an News)

Ha'aretz reports that the Israel Lands Administration is working with the settler organization Ateret Cohanim to establish a claim to 7.5 acres of land in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem, with the intention of transferring it to the organization without a tender.

August 23 *Ha'aretz* reports Palestinians and activists having destroyed 5,000 settler-harvested grape vines near the Dolev settlement.

August 24 Settlers from Hebron break an 11-year-old Palestinian's hand by pushing him off his bike in Hebron. (OCHA)

Settlers open fire at a Palestinian wedding near Nablus, injuring two people. (OCHA)

The IDF fires tear gas and rubber bullets at a separation barrier protest in Bil'in village, injuring two Palestinians. (OCHA)

August 25 The IDF evacuates approximately 100 settlers from the former settlement of Homesh. (OCHA)

August 26 Peace Now reports that 33 kilometers of roads costing \$79 million are currently under construction in the area east of the separation barrier.

August 29 Settlers from Beit Haggai fire at and injure a 22-year-old Palestinian man to prevent him from harvesting his grapes near Hebron. (OCHA)

August 31 An eight-kilometer settler road opens to connect settlements east of Bethlehem and Hebron with Ma'ale Adumim and Har Homa in East Jerusalem. (OCHA)

Settlers from Kiryat Arba and Giva'at Havot beat and injure a 27-year-old Palestinian man from Hebron as he worked on his land. (OCHA)

Police and border police remove 30 settler activists from the ruins of the former settlement of Homesh. (*Ha'aretz*)

September 1 The IDF prevents settlers from entering the former settlement of

SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

Homeshe. The settlers set fire to two of the IDF's vehicles. (OCHA)

September 3 The IDF and border police demolish a Palestinian home in Bir Nabala, Jerusalem, for being built without a permit. (OCHA)

September 4 Israel's High Court of Justice orders Israel to redraw, partially dismantle, and rebuild the route of a 1.7 kilometer section of the separation barrier built around the Palestinian village of Bili'in because it prevents villagers from accessing their farmland. (OCHA)

September 10 Settlers from the settlement area of Abraham Avinu, Hebron, beat and injure three Palestinian boys for swimming in a nearby spring. (OCHA)

September 11 Border police and soldiers demolish 21 barracks and agricultural struc-

tures belonging to Palestinians in the Anata neighborhood, Jerusalem, because of their proximity to the separation barrier and proposed settler road. (OCHA)

Settlers from Hebron take over the roof of al-Aqbat Mosque and begin construction on atop it. (OCHA)

September 12 Israeli security forces evict dozens of settlers from the former settlement of Homeshe. (Arutz 7)

September 14 Two settlers are injured near the Karnei Shomron settlement when Palestinians open fire at their vehicle on Road 55. (OCHA)

September 15 A settler from Hebron runs over a 7-year-old Palestinian boy near the Ibrahim Mosque. (OCHA)

September 17 Settlers from Kiryat Arba run over a 12-year-old Palestinian boy from

Hebron on the main road leading to the settlement. (OCHA)

September 18 The IDF issues a military order confiscating 312 dunams of Palestinian land in Bethlehem for the construction of the separation barrier. (OCHA)

September 22 Settlers stone a Palestinian vehicle on the Jerusalem-Hebron road. Settlers from Nokdim assault two members of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society. (OCHA)

September 23 A settler youth is injured by Palestinians in a drive-by shooting at the Shilo junction. (Arutz 7)

September 25 Land of Israel Loyalists holds a press conference announcing its plan to establish five new settlements in the West Bank. (Arutz 7)

Sources of Population Growth: Israel, West Bank and Gaza, 2000–2006

Year	Area	Annual Population Growth (%)	Migration Balance			Natural Increase (Births minus Deaths)	Population		Net Increase
			Israelis	Immigrants	Total**		Start of Year	End of Year	
2000	West Bank & Gaza	7.9	7,100	1,300	8,200	6,300	183,900	198,300	14,400
	Israel	2.6	–	63,600	61,400	98,700	6,209,100	6,369,300	160,100
2001	West Bank & Gaza	5	2,600	1,000	3,400	6,600	198,300	208,300	10,000
	Israel	2.2	–	46,500	40,100	99,800	6,369,300	6,508,800	139,600
2002	West Bank & Gaza	5.7	4,000	1,100	4,800	7,100	208,300	220,200	11,900
	Israel	1.9	–	36,700	21,500	100,800	6,508,800	6,631,100	122,300
2003	West Bank & Gaza	5.3	3,400	900	3,900	7,700	220,200	231,800	11,600
	Israel	1.8	–	26,100	10,700	106,600	6,631,100	6,748,400	117,300
2004	West Bank & Gaza	5.2	3,600	900	4,100	8,000	231,800	243,900	12,100
	Israel	1.8	–	24,800	13,900	107,300	6,748,400	6,869,500	121,100
2005	West Bank*	5.2	3,300	1,100	4,100	8,100	235,100	247,300	12,200
	Israel	1.8	–	25,300	16,300	104,900	6,869,500	6,990,700	121,200
2006	West Bank*	5.8	5,100	900	5,700	8,600	247,300	261,600	14,400
	Israel	1.8	–	23,700	16,600	109,300	6,990,700	7,116,700	126,000

*Approximately 7,500 settlers were evacuated from Gaza in 2005. No Israeli population remained.

**Total number also includes those who have moved from settlements.

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, "Sources of Population Growth, by District, Population Group and Religion," *Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2001–2007*.

not a confrontation with settlers in the field,” explained one Israeli official. Today there are more than 4,000 dwelling units under construction throughout West Bank settlements.

The Olmert government shows no sign that it is preparing to contest continuing expansion of settlements or to evacuate new settlements created during the last decade.

Government announcements suggesting a reduced settlement drive usually conceal more than they reveal. The *Jerusalem Post*, for example, notes that “while yellow cranes can be seen clearing earth for thousands of homes in many West Bank settlements based on prior authorization, a spokesman for the Construction and Housing Ministry stated that ‘no new building permits have been issued for housing units in the larger West Bank settlements for the last five months.’ According to the spokesman, building permits for only 260 units were issued in those communities in 2007 and those were handed out in the first part of this year. Yet, there is little to indicate that this phenomenon represents a policy shift. The Construction and Housing Ministry spokesman explained that the pace of construction reflected demand and that, ‘overall, new construction was down in many areas of the country.’”

In similar fashion, *Ha’aretz* reports that in her letter to the Ministerial Committee on Unauthorized Outposts—a panel which was formed to address her report criticizing the policy—government attorney Tali Sasson wrote that the committee proposal would constitute “a clear and immediate violation of the prime minister’s prior commitments to the president of the United States” to dismantle the new settlements. The committee proposal will lend a cloak of Israeli legality to the theft of land from Palestinians as well as permit state funding for illegal outposts.

The renewed attention to the continuing construction at Har Homa, an East Jerusalem settlement begun in the heyday of the Oslo period, illustrates Israel’s continuing refusal to surrender its settlement ethos, even as Prime Minister Olmert laments the price Israel will pay as a result. The tender for 300 additional units in the settlement where more than 5,500 reside is no different than the thousands of tenders that have passed uncontested by Washington, and the Palestinians, over many years. In this manufactured drama, everyone is playing his assigned role. Israel is adamant about its right to settle “in Jerusalem,” the Palestinians charge that the action is a violation of signed commitments, and the Bush administration notes its concern.

Has the Annapolis process sparked a transformation in the heretofore benign attitude of the Bush administration toward settlement expansion? “I did, in fact, bring up Har Homa, both earlier in a phone call and then today in our meeting,” explained Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in early December. “I’ve made very clear about seeking clarification on precisely what this means. I’ve made clear that we’re in a time when the goal is to build maximum confidence between the

parties and this doesn’t help to build confidence. And so recognizing that there just shouldn’t be anything that might try and judge final status, the outcomes of final status negotiations. It’s even more important now that we are really on the eve of the beginning of those negotiations. So I’ve made that position clear to the Israeli government.”

This discouraging dialogue does not do justice to either the remarkable clarity of the Israeli prime minister’s remarks about the costs of continuing occupation and settlement or the passion with which Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas promises to abide by an honorable solution that meets the requirements of both peoples. ♦

PALESTINIAN ROAD PASSAGES AROUND JERUSALEM

Israel’s denial to Palestinians of free, fast, and convenient access to East Jerusalem’s urban core began in the 1990s, when Route 60 (page 3 map, A)—the historical north-south road linking major West Bank cities with Jerusalem—was declared off-limits to all Palestinians except residents of annexed East Jerusalem. The map on page 3 illustrates three Israeli options to establish “transportation contiguity” between the northern and southern sectors of the West Bank while continuing to ban Palestinian passage through Jerusalem.

Option B1

In the past few months, Israel has been building a concrete wall in the middle of a new stretch of highway east of Jerusalem. The wall is not meant to divide settlements from the rest of the territory, but to separate Palestinian vehicles from Israeli motorists, confining the former to a narrow corridor. Instead of the relatively fast and smooth drive alongside Ma’ale Adumim and the hairpin-turn back in the direction of Ramallah (Option B2), Option B1 features a lengthy crawl through the densely populated Palestinian towns of Abu Dis and Azariya, passing under the Israeli road to Ma’ale Adumim, before joining the highway now being walled south of Anata. This route, like the others devised for Palestinian traffic, including the narrow and hazardous Wadi Nar road, imposes high transportation costs on the Palestinian economy. It also starkly illustrates the dichotomy between Israeli and Palestinian transportation options as constructed by Israel, graphically symbolized by the wall that divides the highway. The route used by Israeli drivers offers fast and convenient access to the central business districts of Jerusalem, while Palestinian drivers are excluded from the city and the high potential area of E-1 adjacent to it where large settlement development is planned.

Option B2

Option B1 will serve as an alternative to Option B2, part of which is shared by Palestinians and Israelis along the stretch of road bordering Ma’ale Adumim and the E-1 area.

ROAD PASSAGES, *continued on page 7*

SHORT TAKES

Population Growth East and West of the Separation Barrier

Year	<i>East of the Barrier</i>	<i>Increase (%)</i>	<i>West of the Barrier*</i>	<i>Increase (%)</i>
2000	45,520	N/A	146,990	N/A
2001	47,500	4.3	155,240	5.6
2002	50,090	5.5	164,160	5.7
2003	53,050	5.9	172,540	5.1
2004	55,560	4.7	182,380	6.2
2005	58,900	6.0	191,270	4.9
2006	62,500	6.1	201,920	5.6
2007**	65,440	N/A	209,716	N/A

*Excluding the settler population in East Jerusalem.

**As of September 2007.

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, List of Locals, 2000-2006;

"Most Settlements Lie East of Fence, Most Settlers West," *Ha'aretz*, August 16, 2007.

Hebron: The Israeli Settlement in the a-Ras Neighborhood

On 19 March 2007, a new settlement was established in the heart of the a-Ras Palestinian neighborhood. In the months that have passed since then, despite the decision of the defense minister at the time to evacuate the settlement, the settlement has grown. Recently, the settlement was connected to the electricity grid, and construction and renovation work is taking place at the site. . . . During the course of the first six months of the new settlement, B'Tselem and ACRI documented scores of cases in which settlers attacked Palestinians in the area. The attacks include beatings, blocking of passage, destruction of property, throwing of stones and eggs, hurling of refuse, glass bottles, and bottles full of urine, urinating from the settlement structure onto the street, spitting, threats, and curses.

The army set up a position on the roof of the settlement building and a checkpoint on the road nearby, so it is impossible for an attack to occur in this area that is not within the eyesight of security forces. . . . The new restrictions on Palestinians in a-Ras are in addition to the prohibition on Palestinian vehicles using the Kiryat Arba road, a north-south artery that passes through the neighborhood. This prohibition has been in place since the beginning of the second intifada, in September 2000. . . . As the restrictions on movement in the area increase, the greater the harm to the entire city, given that the new settlement in the a-Ras neighborhood completes territorial contiguity of settlement points from Kiryat Arba in the east to the Tel Rumeida settlement in the west.

B'tselem, October 19, 2007

On November 5, Hamas political bureau chief Khalid Mish'al gave a speech to Arab intellectuals gathered at the Palestine Culture Institute in Damascus. The following are excerpts from the speech carried by pro-Hamas al-Aqsa TV. The text is reprinted here with thanks to Mideastwire.

There is also another sign on concessions and this has to do with the exchange of land. On the occasion, I would like to say that this is not something new but it is being dealt with now with greater audacity. I regret to say that when we studied even the Arab stand, we found out that many Arab countries have come to accept the principle of the exchange of land. . . .

Exchange of lands starts with one, two, and three percent but since you accepted the principle, in light of Arab generosity and the acceptance of the deceptive game, then the matter might unfortunately lead to more than this.

This is some form of legalization of the settlements. The exchange of land is grave not only in principle but also in view of the nature of land exchanged. Exchange operations take place on land in Jerusalem and in important locations in the West Bank under which there are important aquifers. Brothers, we must know that the settlement blocs that Israel wants to annex are either sacred because they are around Jerusalem, have military and strategic dimensions, or because they sit on important aquifers.

If Israel annexes these areas, the West Bank people will have no water to drink. Imagine we give a dunam here or a kilometre there, in Jerusalem for example or in other West Bank locations, while we get in exchange land in Negev or God knows where. . . .

◆

ROAD PASSAGES, *continued from page 6*

Option B3

Unlike Options B1 and B2, Option B3 would move Palestinian traffic around Jerusalem farther eastward, eliminating it altogether from Palestinian areas between Ma'ale Adumim and Jerusalem. The projected route continues east from the Wadi Nar road, making numerous descents and ascents before intersecting Highway 1 along the barren stretch between Jerusalem and Jericho. From here, the most probable option onward to Ramallah is the traditional road (Route 440) to and from Jericho to Ramallah. Compared to the traditional direct link (Highway 60) through Jerusalem, Option B3 increases the driving distance between Bethlehem and Ramallah threefold and the cumulative elevation to be covered about fifteen-fold, because Jericho lies far below sea-level, while Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Ramallah are at altitudes of about 700 to 800 meters. ◆

THE SETTLEMENT FREEZE RUNAROUND CONTINUES AT STATE

Question: [Israeli Prime Minister Ehud]Olmert said that he's not going to be freezing settlement construction in the main settlements, the so-called consensus blocks. And I'm wondering if that's acceptable to the United States.

Mr. McCormack: You know, he's made certain promises. He's made them—made public commitments. He's made private commitments to us. Those are consonant. There are obligations under the Roadmap and Prime Minister Olmert has made implementation, full implementation, of the Roadmap one of his goals. He's committed to that. And there are certain steps along the way; this is an iterative process. So I'm not going to comment on the state of the process at this time point. They've made certain commitments. The Israeli side has certain commitments. I expect that they will follow through on those, as will the Palestinians.

Question: So maybe you can just clarify what the standard is in general that you're expecting Israel to meet. Because it sounded like and it's been interpreted by some people that [President George W.] Bush is actually saying something different; he's talking about not expanding settlements, as opposed to the Roadmap which talks about no settlement growth and natural growth included in the freeze. So do you

see a difference there?

Mr. McCormack: Again, I'm not going to get into interpretations at this point. This is going to be an iterative process that plays out over time. And the end result, we hope, is going to be a final agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians. They will define what the contents of that agreement are.

And the other outcome of the process is that the Roadmap will be fully implemented. And along the way there are going to be a number of different steps. I'm not going to try to analyze where we are any further beyond what the President has said, the Secretary [of State Condoleezza Rice] has said in public, along with President [Mahmoud] Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert.

Question: Sean, if the standard is indeed the language that is in the Roadmap . . . which is a freeze on all settlement activity, including so-called natural growth.

Mr. McCormack: And Prime Minister Olmert said that Israel intends to fully implement the Roadmap.

Department of State Daily Press Briefing by
Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs
Sean McCormick, November 29, 2007

The emergence of responsible Palestinian leaders has given Israel the confidence to reach out to them in partnership. During my last trip to Israel, Prime Minister Olmert made a significant and path-breaking speech. He said that Israel now has a true partner for peace in President Abbas. He said that there is now a real opportunity to make progress toward the vision of two states. And he said that now is the time for Israel to begin, in his words, vigorous, continuing, and ongoing negotiations for peace with the Palestinians. . . . [M]ost Palestinians now believe that Israel will always be their neighbor and that no Palestinian state is going to be born through violence. . . .

I believe that most Palestinians and most Arab states are

ready to end the conflict. I believe that most Israelis are ready to leave most of the—nearly all of the West Bank, just as they were ready to leave Gaza, for the sake of peace. . . .

Our current course is not meant to replace the road map, nor to supplant direct negotiations between the parties, but to take this new opportunity and to pursue peace and to protect ourselves against those with far darker designs. We can succeed and we must succeed. Failure is simply not an option.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Address to
Delegates at the United Jewish Communities General
Assembly, Nashville, Tennessee, November 13, 2007

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