

REPORT ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENT IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

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PALESTINIANS PAYING THE PRICE FOR SETTLEMENT EXPANSION

By Geoffrey Aronson

Land is at the heart of the century-old contest between Israelis and Palestinians. Settlements are the most noteworthy manifestation of this continuing competition, the clearest barometer of relations between the two peoples and the most potent obstacle to the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The notion that Israel's expanding settlement enterprise can proceed without harming Palestinians or infringing on their patrimony is as old as the Zionist movement itself. If the slogan "a land without a people for a people without a land" proved successful in mobilizing genera-

Approximately 25 houses have been demolished in Hebron's Old City since 1967 to facilitate settlement construction. More than 100 dwellings have been abandoned by Palestinians due to settler and IDF actions, and 1,500 Palestinian businesses located in the Old City have been closed by military order.

"Home Demolitions in the Name of 'Security': Focus on Hebron," prepared by the PLO Negotiations Support Unit, December 18, 2002

tions of Jews to come and settle Palestine, it was from the outset, and remains today, a notion at odds with the reality on the ground. Former prime minister Ehud Barak presided over the most extensive expansion of settlements and their lands in almost a decade, in part because he underestimated the continuing power of settlement to "create facts on the ground" that Palestinians would find insufferable. Today Barak and his plan to evacuate some settlements have passed from the scene, but the many new settlements that he founded but claimed could be removed as part of an agreement with the Palestinians remain.

Current prime minister Ariel Sharon, a fighter for Jewish sovereignty throughout Palestine since his youth, knows firsthand the enduring Palestinian opposition to Israel's expansion.

Sharon, far more than his contemporaries, understands the centrality of settlement as an instrument to define the still-unfinished map of the State of Israel. He has always known that settlements are the spearhead of Israel's effort to deny Palestinian sovereignty and independence, and his efforts for more than a generation have been dedicated to realizing this steadfast conviction.

When the settlement enterprise was in its infancy in the early years after Israel's conquest of the occupied territories in June 1967, proponents often argued that neither Palestinians nor their lands were at risk from Israeli settlement plans. It was also argued that settlements were an instrument of peace, because the consequences of settlement expansion would force Palestinians to make peace on Israel's terms, securing their diminishing patrimony in order to contain Israeli expansion. Palestinians always knew these mutually contradictory claims to be false, the product of willful ignorance, religious fanaticism, or deliberate hypocrisy. The architects of settlement, like the Palestinians, have no illusions. Each understands that settlement expansion threatens an honorable Palestinian existence in the occupied territories. As settlements and their lands have expanded, so too has their destructive impact on the everyday lives of Palestinians.

Also in this issue:

Bush Administration Changes Tack on Jerusalem Voting	2
Sharon Maps Out "the Future"	3
U.S. Avoids Issue of Settlements' "Natural Growth"	8

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EXPANSION, continued on page 7

TO OUR READERS

In the November-December issue of the *Settlement Report*, I criticized the Bush administration for continuing to push the Quartet's "road map," which I considered a meager response to the current crisis. I did so in the view that the road map is a warmed-over version of the Mitchell/Tenet plan that failed for lack of a clear vision of a two-state, final status outcome and was front-loaded with unrealistic conditions. Now the administration has retreated further by insisting that further discussion of the plan, originally authored by the United States, be suspended until after Israel's January 28 elections.

The administration has all but acknowledged that it is backing off from even this modest effort in deference to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who opposes the plan's settlement freeze. In doing so, Washington consolidates its cozy relationship with Sharon, notwithstanding his historic opposition to a viable Palestinian state and his dedication to settlements. Wash-

ington's embrace of Sharon, which helps him in the run-up to elections, is all the more remarkable given the pro-peace platform of Amram Mitzna, the Labor challenger. Mitzna would negotiate unconditionally with any Palestinian leadership and unilaterally evacuate all settlements in Gaza within a year and 65% of the West Bank, pending a final agreement. Any previous U.S. government, Republican or Democrat, would have loudly cheered this bold, unprecedented plan. Yet the Bush administration, departing radically from past policy, backs Sharon and ignores Mitzna, whose approach to peace far better serves U.S., Israeli, and Palestinian interests. Why? The reasons seem to be the administration's fixation on Iraq, the illusion that Sharon is a reliable partner against terrorism, and genuine ideological support for Sharon in some quarters of the White House.



Bush Administration Changes Tack on Jerusalem Voting

The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution entitled "Jerusalem" on December 3, 2002. The resolution notes that "any actions taken by Israel to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the Holy City of Jerusalem are illegal and therefore null and void and have no validity whatsoever." It was approved by a vote of 154 in favor, 5 against (including the United States), and 6 abstentions.

The Bush administration's 2002 vote marked a change in the historical U.S. position on similar resolutions. The 2001 vote on the same resolution, for example, was 130 in favor, 2 against (Israel and the Republic of Nauru), and 10 abstentions (including the United States).

"The resolution on Jerusalem this year seeks to impose specific terms on the issue of Jerusalem, which Israelis and Palestinians have agreed will be addressed in their final status negotiations," noted senior advisor Richard Erdman in his explanation of the U.S. vote. "The United States objects to this intrusion by the General Assembly into the negotiations. Our position continues to be that Jerusalem is one of the final status issues to be negotiated directly by the parties, and the Quartet and others in the international community are working with the parties toward a resumption of political dialogue to make such negotiations possible.

"The United States fully supports the internationally recognized right of religious freedom for all people."

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SHARON MAPS OUT THE FUTURE

On December 4, 2003 Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon offered the most detailed view of the territorial and political concepts guiding Israeli policy in the occupied territories. His view of the prospective Palestinian state is reminiscent of the autonomy plan of Prime Minister Menachem Begin. The most notable feature of Begin's plan was its support for "autonomy for the people, but not for the land." Excerpts from Sharon's address to the annual conference sponsored by the Institute of Policy and Strategy in Herzliya follow. The entire address can be viewed at: <http://www.herzliya-conference.org>.

From the first days of the establishment of the State of Israel, our bond with the United States has been a supreme strategic asset. My government has further consolidated our relations with the United States and formed a special closeness with the U.S. administration and Congress. These special relations, the understanding of Israel's needs, and the cooperation with President Bush and his administration are unprecedented.

Our political understandings with the United States and the administration's understanding of our security needs have provided us with the required leeway in our ongoing war on terrorism.

On June 24th this year, President Bush presented his plan for a true solution to our conflict with the Palestinians. The peace plan outlined in the President's speech is a reasonable, pragmatic and practical one, which offers a real opportunity to achieve an agreement. We have accepted in principle the President's plan and the sequence presented therein. Our agreements with the Palestinians are based on the lessons the Americans learned from the Clinton-Barak plan, and my experience as one who has, for many years, participated in the security and political campaign in the Palestinian arena.

After concerted efforts, the U.S. administration has understood and agreed that the only way to achieve a true peace agreement with the Palestinians is progress in phases, with the first phase being a complete cessation of terror. Only after a cessation of terror—and this is already agreed by most world leaders—will the commencement of peace negotiations between the parties be possible.

On the basis of lessons learned from past agreements, it is clear to all that Israel can no longer be expected to make political concessions until there is proven calm and Palestinian governmental reforms.

In this context, it is important to remember that political concessions which will be made in the future—as those made in the past—are irreversible.

Even the current security reality, with the IDF operating freely inside Palestinian cities, arises from security needs and has not changed the political situation of two years ago. Israel will not re-control territories from which it withdrew as a result of political agreements.

The achievement of true coexistence must be carried out, first and foremost, by the replacement of the Palestinian leadership. The U.S. administration—with the world following in its footsteps—has already accepted our unequivocal position that no progress will be possible with Arafat as the chairman of the Palestinian Authority. This man is not—and never will be—a partner to peace.

The two sides will advance to the next phase of President Bush's sequence when a new, different, responsible and non-corrupt Palestinian leadership emerges. Terror will cease, and the Palestinian leadership will not allow it to be renewed. Civil and economic cooperation will be established. Incitement will be stopped and education towards peace will be fostered. At the same time, Israel will act to lift military pressure, create territorial continuity between Palestinian population centers, and ease daily life for the Palestinian population.

The second phase of President Bush's sequence proposes the establishment of a Palestinian state with borders yet to be finalized, and which will overlap with terri-

President Bush's sequence proposes the establishment of a Palestinian state with borders yet to be finalized, and which will overlap with territories A and B, except for essential security zones. This Palestinian state will be completely demilitarized. It will be allowed to maintain lightly armed police and interior forces to ensure civil order. Israel will continue to control all entries and exits to the Palestinian state, will command its airspace, and not allow it to form alliances with Israel's enemies.

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In the final phase of President Bush's sequence negotiations will be opened to determine the final status of the Palestinian state and fix its permanent borders. As I emphasized, no progress will be made from one phase to the next until such time as quiet has been restored, Palestinian rule has undergone fundamental changes, and coexistence is ensured.

Israel is prepared to make painful concessions for a true peace. However, the government under my leadership will not be seduced into believing false promises which will endanger the security of the State of Israel. ♦

SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

July 30 Israeli officials report that 583 Israelis have been killed since the start of the al-Aqsa intifada in September 2000: 38% inside the Green Line, 35% in the West Bank, 18% in Jerusalem, and 9% in Gaza. (*Ma'ariv*)

August 2 A settler couple are shot dead on their way home to the settlement of Eli.

An Israeli soldier and a Palestinian bystander are killed when a Palestinian fires on border police and a Bezeq telecommunications vehicle near the Damascus Gate of Jerusalem's Old City. (Israel Line)

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) begin enforcing a ban on the movement of Palestinian vehicles in the northern West Bank and Gaza Strip. (*Ha'aretz*)

August 6 U.S. secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld refers to lands Israel seized in the 1967 war as "so-called occupied territories," contradicting the long-standing U.S. stance that regards East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip as occupied territory.

In the settlement of Itamar, a Palestinian stabs a resident. In the village of Jammain, Palestinian gunmen kill two settlers selling fuel to a cement factory. (*al-Ahram Weekly*)

August 7 *Ha'aretz* reports that the IDF is paying \$2 million a year to settlements in the West Bank and Gaza to rent buildings for housing soldiers protecting the settlements.

U.S. ambassador to Israel Daniel Kurtzer states that Secretary Rumsfeld's August 6 remarks were personal and do not signal a change in U.S. policy. Kurtzer adds, "I use the language of the president of the United States and he talked in his speech about the territories that were occupied in 1967." (*Jerusalem Post*)

August 10 A woman from Moshav Mechora, in the Jordan Valley, is shot and killed in her home by a Palestinian who is then killed by IDF soldiers. (*Yediot Aharonot*)

August 11 The Israeli security cabinet approves the first phase of the seam-line fence, or separation wall, dividing Israel from the West Bank. The initial part of the fence will run 110 kilometers along the northern section of the West Bank from Kafr Salem to Kafr Kassem. (*Ha'aretz*)

Settlers from Eli break into a Palestinian home in Luban al-Sharqiyya near the location where snipers killed two settlers on August 2. The IDF places a curfew on Palestinian residents during negotiations between settlers and the IDF. Settlers leave the building before nightfall.

August 14 Shas Party spiritual leader Rabbi Ovadia Yosef visits the settlement of Emmanuel, marking a dramatic reversal of his long opposition to settlements. "Yesha residents are heroes," he declares.

August 15 B'Tselem reports that during the al-Aqsa intifada, at least 40 Palestinian homes belonging to Palestinians allegedly involved in attacks have been destroyed, at least 21 in recent weeks. (B'Tselem)

A tender is published in *Ha'aretz* for the construction of 290 dwelling units in Emmanuel.

A tender is published in *Ha'aretz* for the construction of 303 dwelling units in the Olive Hill section of Efrat.

A tender is published in *Ha'aretz* for the construction of 72 dwelling units in Ariel.

Settlers from Eli, Ma'ale Levona, and Shilo reoccupy the house in Luban al-Sharqiyya. They demand the house's destruction and the "cleansing" of an area nearby.

August 16 The Israeli High Court rejects the petition of a Palestinian resident in Gaza contesting the confiscation of his land for the construction of a road to the settlement of Netzarim. (*Jerusalem Post* and *Ha'aretz*)

It is reported that the Israeli Religious Affairs Ministry, along with the Housing and Interior Ministries, plans to invest more than \$4 million to build 55 synagogues, construct 30 ritual baths, and renovate 43 existing baths in the settlements over the next two years. (*Yediot Aharonot*)

August 19 A tender is published in *Yediot Aharonot* for the leasing of 86 "build your own" plots in Har Adar.

A tender is published in *Yediot Aharonot* for the construction of six dwelling units in Ma'ale Adumim.

August 20 An IDF soldier is killed by a sniper at the Yakinton outpost in the Katif bloc in Gaza. (*Yediot Aharonot*)

A Hamas guerrilla shoots and kills an Israeli soldier guarding a settlement near Khan

Yunis. The attack is in retaliation for the IDF's assassination of a Hamas member. Israel responds by shelling the residential area from which the guerrilla fired, killing a 15-year-old Palestinian boy. (*al-Ahram Weekly*)

August 22 Israeli defense minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer announces that 19 illegal outposts have been dismantled in the West Bank. Opposition leader MK Yossi Sarid claims that no settlers have been evacuated and that any talk of removing illegal outposts is trickery.

August 23 At the Kfar Darom settlement in the Gaza Strip, three armed Palestinians are killed by an IDF patrol near the security fence. The al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigade claims responsibility. (Kol Yisrael)

August 25 Defense Ministry director-general Amos Yaron announces that the first 112 kilometers of the seam-line fence will be completed by July 2003. (*Ha'aretz*)

August 26 Two mortar shells fall in settlement communities in the Gaza Strip, and an antitank rocket is fired at an IDF outpost near Netzarim. No injuries are reported. (*Ha'aretz*)

The Jerusalem municipality announces plans to demolish 15 homes in Wadi Qaddum to expand a road to connect the settlements of Gilo and Har Homa to Ma'ale Adumim and Mishor Adumim. (*al-Quds*)

August 27 Mortar shells are fired at the settlement of Neve Dekalim in Gaza, striking one home and damaging others. (*Jerusalem Post*)

August 29 *Ha'aretz* reports that "some months ago the IDF put forward a plan for an interim agreement that includes evacuation of all settlements in Gaza and seven in the West Bank in return for a provisional Palestinian state and the extended postponement of a final status agreement." IDF redeployments would establish "full" Palestinian territorial continuity throughout the Gaza Strip and "transport links" between Palestinian blocs in the West Bank.

August 31 An Israeli couple is injured when a Palestinian infiltrates the settlement of Bracha, near Nablus, after the IDF kills a Fatah suspect and four children. (*Ha'aretz*)

SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

September 1 *Ha'aretz* reports that Peace Now is offering to help settlers move out of the territories. In a letter sent to hundreds of settlers, the group cites a survey indicating that "many Israelis living in the territories are interested in returning to live in Israel, within the boundaries of the Green Line."

September 2 The ELAD foundation, which promotes Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem, takes over the home of a Palestinian in the neighborhood of Jabal Mukhabar as part of its plan for a 600-unit Jewish neighborhood. ELAD claims that it legally purchased the house six years ago. (*Ha'aretz*)

Construction began for permanent dwellings at the settlement at Tel Rumena in Hebron. Seven units will be constructed in phase one at the site, which now comprises 60 settlers residing in caravans.

September 6 The United Nations Relief and Works Agency reports that from October 2000 to the end of June 2002, 516 shelters housing 721 families in the Gaza Strip had been destroyed or damaged beyond repair by Israeli military action.

September 9 Israeli settlers attack residents of Sinjil village, north of Ramallah, and prevent them from harvesting crops. (Hear Palestine)

In Tulkarem, Israel destroys cultivated land covering an area two kilometers long and sixty meters wide in preparation for building the seam-line fence. (Hear Palestine)

September 11 *Ha'aretz* reports Israeli security cabinet approval of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's recommendation, supported by Jerusalem mayor Ehud Olmert, to include Rachel's Tomb, situated on the outskirts of Bethlehem, within the Jerusalem "seam line."

The IDF orders the confiscation of 8,000 dunums of agricultural land from Ya'bid and surrounding villages near Jenin. (Hear Palestine)

Palestinians fire two mortar shells at Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip. No injuries or damages are reported.

A tender is published in *Ha'aretz* for 43 "build your own" plots in Elkana.

September 12 A resident of the Einav settlement is wounded by gunfire while traveling to Avnei Hafetz. (Kol Yisrael)

Israel destroys 200 dunums of cultivated land in Rafat, northwest of Jerusalem. Village council members report Israeli settlers uprooting olive trees and carrying them to locations within Israel. (Hear Palestine)

September 13 The American company Dikshin wins the tender for construction of the separation fence around greater Jerusalem.

Jerusalem mayor Olmert says that the annexation of Ma'ale Adumim to Jerusalem is "only a matter of time." (Kol Ha'ir)

September 14 *Ha'aretz* reports that the Shin Bet opposes allowing Jews access to Joseph's Tomb, in Nablus. The IDF had allowed 75 settlers to enter the site.

September 17 *Ha'aretz* reports that a wall 8 to 10 meters high will be constructed around the site of Rachel's Tomb and that the site will be unofficially annexed to the Jerusalem municipality.

The IDF demolishes more than 34 residential units under construction in Ein Sinya, in northern Ramallah. (Hear Palestine)

Hear Palestine reports an IDF order placing parts of al-Ras village between the old Green Line and the seam-line wall.

In a Hebron schoolyard, eight Palestinian children are injured when a bomb left by settlers explodes. Israeli authorities detonate two other bombs. (PHRMG)

The IDF permits "settlers and members of the right-wing" to pray at Joseph's Tomb, in Nablus, for the first time in the two years since the IDF withdrew under fire from the site in October 2000. (*Yediot Aharonot*)

September 18 One man is killed and another injured by gunfire near the West Bank settlement of Mevo Dotan, in the Jenin region.

A resident of Ma'ale Adumim is found murdered outside the West Bank village of al-Azariya.

September 19 Israeli settlers attack and wound residents of Beni Na'im and Ya'bid, which are under a curfew. (Hear Palestine)

The Palestinian Red Crescent reports that more than 73 Palestinians have been killed since the beginning of August.

In Abu Dis, in Jerusalem, the IDF demolishes the homes of two youths allegedly

involved in an attack carried out in 2001 in the West Bank. The demolition leaves at least 25 people without refuge.

September 22 Israel destroys hundreds of dunums of agricultural land in the area of the Netzer Hazani settlement in the Gaza Strip. (Hear Palestine)

After five months of quiet, gunshots are fired from Beit Jala toward the Jerusalem settlement suburb of Gilo. No injuries or damages are reported. (*Ha'aretz*)

September 23 In Hebron, the IDF imposes a curfew on Palestinians during Sukkot celebrations staged by settlers. (*Ha'aretz*)

September 24 The IDF destroys the home of the man who allegedly carried out the attack at Atzmona in which five students were killed. (*Mideast Mirror*)

An Israeli is killed and his children wounded in Hebron when a Palestinian opens fire on a group of Israeli tourists. (*Mideast Mirror*)

September 25 Israel destroys agricultural land near Za'tara village, Bethlehem, to build a bypass road. (Hear Palestine)

In Hebron, settlers announce plans to take over abandoned houses in the casbah said to have been previously owned by Jews. They plan to house dozens of families in them. National Infrastructure Minister Effi Eitam has endorsed the plan. (*Ma'ariv*)

Israeli settlers and lawmakers mark the transformation of the Rehalim outpost into an official settlement. The Defense Ministry claims that the outpost's designation as an educational institute four years prior permits construction there. Knesset member Benny Elon rejects the idea of dismantling outposts, saying, "We will fight for every outpost that they want to take down. We will not compromise or concede on any outpost. We can talk about dismantling refugee camps and transferring Arabs, but the Jews are here to stay." (*Jerusalem Post* and AP)

September 28 Israeli authorities close the District Coordination Office near Beit Hanun, expelling staff and expropriating weapons and computers, effectively canceling administrative relations with Palestinian Authority officials.

SHORT TAKES

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture, since the beginning of the al-Aqsa intifada, 51,711 dunums of Palestinian land, much of it agricultural, has been bulldozed in the Gaza Strip, inflicting losses of over \$175 million.

al-Ayyam, October 21, 2002

Thirty-eight people have been killed in 13 separate infiltrations into West Bank and Gaza settlements over the past two years. In nine of these incidents, the infiltrators breached a fence surrounding the settlement, usually a "stupid fence" (i.e., one without an electronic warning system). At the same time, several infiltration attacks were thwarted in unfenced settlements, thanks to patrols conducted in the area and strategically situated observation posts.

The fence, it seems, is not a foolproof guarantee of security. In settlements lacking a "sterile space" between the fence and the closest homes, where IDF soldiers or settlement security officers did not have sufficient time from the moment the gunman crossed the fence to the moment he attacked his victims, the fences have proven worthless.

On the other hand, the effectiveness of fences has been proven time and again in recent months, primarily in the Katif settlement bloc in the Gaza Strip. Electronic fences there have averted attacks and exposed the infiltration of dozens of gunmen before they were able to kill or hurt Israelis. In these cases, settlement security officers or well-trained IDF troops managed to shoot at the gunmen very soon after the moment of infiltration. The significant factor in preventing casualties in these incidents was the "sterile space" around the fence, empty of any vegetation, homes or other hiding places, which gave security forces the few extra precious moments needed to halt the infiltrators.

Ha'aretz, October 31, 2002

Our main goal should be a political program that does not involve uprooting settlements or the expulsion of residents, whether Jewish or Arab. Instead there would be Israeli enclaves in the Palestinian area and Palestinian enclaves in the state of Israel. The [Israeli] Arabs of Umm al-Fahm, who define themselves as Palestinians at every opportunity, would have Palestinian citizenship instead of Israeli citizenship, and Ariel's residents would have Israeli citizenship. The only thing that would be harmed would be the territorial, and that's a relatively minor problem. That way the settlements would be transformed from an obstacle to peace to a test of peace, because only under peaceful conditions can such mutual enclaves be maintained. . . . Our duty is to start a broad public relations campaign that will say the settlers have civil rights no less than the Palestinians, and therefore it is time to stop

talking about removing settlements, because that would be illegal.

Settlement leader Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun,
Ma'ariv, October 18, 2002

To die today for the war in the territories is a superfluous death, in my opinion. It's better to die in a traffic accident than to die to protect the settlers on the hilltops and the other places in the territories. If I were to get an order to do reserve duty like Tamir got, I would refuse to obey orders. What's the difference between dying for the Beaufort [castle, scene of a battle in 1982] and dying for Ariel. Both of them are unnecessary and pointless deaths. From the Beaufort to Ariel we haven't made any progress. As a state we are just retreating. Sharon was running things then, and he's running them now too. That's what is tragic about the whole situation. Then there were 7,000 Jewish settlers in the territories and now there are 170,000 settlers. We've gone backwards.

Tal Raz, mourning the death of Tamir Masad,
a reserve officer killed at Ariel in a struggle
with a Palestinian suicide bomber,
Ha'aretz, November 1, 2002

"Yanun is being made an example of," said Musli Hardil, a 35-year-old bus driver from Aqrabeh. "We are being shown the future. No one knows who will be next, and that is the point."

"The settlers want to frighten us all away. Then the land will be theirs."

al-Ahram Weekly, November 22-29, 2002

In the latest Truman Institute-Palestine Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) survey, 53% of Palestinians support armed attacks against Israeli civilians inside Israel, and about 90% support attacks against soldiers and settlers in the West Bank and Gaza. Sixty-two percent of Israelis now support the dismantlement of most settlements in the West Bank and Gaza as part of a peace agreement with the Palestinians, compared with 52% in November 2001 and 38% right after the Camp David summit and before the intifada started. Until an agreement is reached, 64% of Israelis support a freeze on further settlement expansion in the West Bank and Gaza. Moreover, 70% of Israelis support tough governmental policy against extreme Israeli elements in the West Bank and Gaza, even if this can result in a confrontation with settlers.

Americans for Peace Now, December 2, 2002

For the settlement in Hebron, since its inception in April 1968, the watchword has been to remake Hebron, a community of 100,000 Palestinians, into a Jewish city and to make life in the city so unbearable for Palestinians that they leave. This intention is known to anyone who has spent time among its 400 settlers. Certainly Israel's political and security establishment is under no illusion that Hebron's settlers have a more benign objective. Both are complicit in the incremental destruction of Hebron as a living and viable Palestinian city.

One hundred Palestinian businessmen and shopkeepers with the misfortune to conduct their livelihood near the Avraham Avenu settlement in Hebron were forced to close their doors in mid-2002 "in order to create a buffer zone between the Hebron settlers and the Palestinian population," reported *Ha'aretz*, after the brutal killing of an infant whose parents live in the settlement. Two hundred Palestinian families have been impoverished by the transformation of two commercial markets into closed military zones—"closed to the Palestinian proprietors but not to the settlers who break into the stores, steal merchandise and vandalize equipment. There are 21 detailed complaints from store owners, but only in a few cases have the investigations developed into indictments."

"Army officers declare vast tracts 'closed military zones,'" writes Israeli attorney Shlomo Leker, who represents the Hebron businessmen. "The suffering of the civilian Palestinian population is usually explained by the need to 'gain security' for the settlers who have chosen to set up outposts in Palestinian population centers in the West Bank. At this level of friction . . . there are gross violations of the directives of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which are supposed to protect the civilian [Palestinian] population in an occupied territory. These violations are defined as war crimes in international law."

Israel acknowledges that the security of Hebron's settlers and the livelihoods of the tens of thousands of Palestinians residing around them are incompatible.

"The security needs are still valid and outweigh the other considerations in this issue," writes attorney Udit Corinaldi-Sirkis from the State Prosecutor's Office, adding "it is likely that it will be possible to open the stores in the market if the Jewish residents are evacuated from the wholesale market."

But the record of Israeli settlements in Hebron does not leave any hope for the settlers' departure from the market nor

in the economic rehabilitation of Palestinians pauperized as a consequence of their presence

Hebron is not the exception but rather a metaphor for the poisonous relationship between Palestinians and Israelis in the occupied territories. It signifies the depth to which relations can descend when settlers abandon all pretense about their objective and Palestinian forbearance turns into resignation, despair and violence.

Recently Michael Ben Yair penned a bitter indictment in *Ha'aretz*. "The Six-Day War was forced on us; but the war's seventh day, which began on June 12, 1967, continues to this day and is the product of our choice. We enthusiastically chose to become a colonialist society, ignoring international treaties, expropriating lands, transferring settlers from Israel to the occupied territories, engaging in theft and finding justifications for all this."

Yair's observations ring true in Hebron no less than in Shilo, near Nablus, in Bet El outside Ramallah and Ganei Tal in Gaza. The scores of settlements Israel has established in the last thirty-five years do not simply complicate Palestinian life. The system of Israeli rule established in the wake of the destruction of the Palestinian Authority, in large part to assure settlers' ability to continue a "normal life," poses an existential threat to it.

Yair was attorney general during Yitzhak Rabin's last government, a party, like its predecessors and successors, to the transgressions he describes. The Oslo years did not bring an end to such measures—an important reason, now recognized by many, for the popular Palestinian disenchantment with diploma-

cy that erupted in September 2000.

The November 15 death of a squad of Israeli soldiers sent to guard Hebron's settlers has occasioned another round in this bitter, virulent history. The Sharon government is resurrecting the prime minister's 1998 proposal to establish a residential link along the 1.5 km route between Kiryat Arba and Hebron's Tomb of the Patriarchs. Along the first 700 meters, the IDF has already uprooted an olive orchard and demolished three houses used by Palestinian gunmen. Along the remainder of the route, orders have been issued for the demolition of 15 Palestinian houses to enable the construction of a \$1 million road, a project that has the support of Israel's Ministry of Tourism. Awaiting approval is Sharon's plan for 1,000 new dwelling units along the route.

"The army will avenge and we will build," said the spokesman of the Jewish settlement in Hebron, encapsulating the continuing story of Israeli rule in the occupied territories. ♦

Current prime minister Ariel Sharon, knows at first hand the enduring Palestinian opposition to Israel's expansion. Sharon, far more than his contemporaries, understands the centrality of settlement as an instrument to define the still-unfinished map of the State of Israel. He has always known that settlements are the spearhead of Israel's effort to deny Palestinian sovereignty and independence, and his efforts for more than one generation have been dedicated to realizing this steadfast conviction.

U.S. Avoids Issue of Settlements' "Natural Growth"

Mr. Boucher: There was not a Powell-Peres understanding on natural growth of settlements. Natural growth of settlements is an issue that has been around for a long time. It is an issue that has been discussed between Secretary Powell and Foreign Minister Peres and other Israeli leaders—Prime Minister Sharon and others. So it is a subject that had been discussed—about what was meant by those who advocated such things.

Our position on settlements, I think, has been very consistent, very clear. The secretary expressed it not too long ago. He said settlement activity has severely undermined Palestinian trust and hope, preempts and prejudices the outcome of

negotiations, and in doing so, cripples chances for real peace and prosperity.

The U.S. has long opposed settlement activity and, consistent with the report of the Mitchell Committee, settlement activity must stop.

Question: Okay. You avoided the question of natural growth. Could you be a little more precise about that?

Mr. Boucher: No, I cannot. It has been a subject that has been discussed—but I think our position on settlements, as a whole, is quite clear.

Richard Boucher, U.S. Department of State,
Daily Press Briefing, November 25, 2002

The settlers are no longer outsiders or squatters as they once were. A great many became settlers for purely pragmatic reasons—cheaper housing in what they hoped would be more pleasant surroundings within easy commuting distance to Israel. For almost twenty-five years the settlers have been praised by every Israeli government as patriots, good citizens, good Zionists. At least in the West Bank, the settlement project long ago became a cornerstone of Zionist and Israeli national identity. By now there is a second generation of settlers who see no difference between themselves and other Israelis who live in Tel Aviv or Tiberias. Since the outbreak of the most recent intifada and the emergence of reckless suicide bombers, moreover, they are not merely defending an idea; as they see it, they are defending “home.”

The vast settlement project after 1967, aside from being grossly unjust, has been self-defeating and politically ruinous. “We’ve fed the heart on fantasies, the heart’s grown brutal on the fare,” as William B. Yeats put it almost a century ago in a similar dead-end situation in Ireland. The settlement project has not provided more security but less. It may yet, I tremble at the thought, lead to results far more terrible than those we are now witnessing.

*Amos Elon, “Israelis and Palestinians: What Went Wrong?”
New York Review of Books, December 19, 2002*