

REPORT ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENT IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

A Bimonthly Publication of the Foundation for Middle East Peace

Volume 18 Number 2

March–April 2008

OLMERT AND SETTLEMENTS: LOFTY GOALS BETRAYED BY ACTIONS ON THE GROUND

By *Geoffrey Aronson*

Since his election as prime minister, Ehud Olmert, long a stalwart supporter of Greater Israel, has made unprecedented statements declaring an interest in ending Israel's rule over Palestinians. In stark contrast to Olmert's rhetoric, however, the settlement machine grinds on. Many Israelis and others are now asking whether Olmert means what he says when he voices a need to end occupation, evacuate settlements, and agree to the creation of a Palestinian state. Or are his comments merely a new twist to Israel's oft-declared interest in "stretching out its hand in peace" to its Arab adversaries even as this objective is betrayed by Israeli actions on the ground?

Some History

Menachem Begin's election as prime minister in May 1977 opened a new chapter in Israel and the national enterprise of settling the West Bank. No longer would the policy of "creeping annexation," adopted by Israeli leaders during 1967–1977, be obscured by the official policy of "deciding not to decide" the future of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Begin was not one to shrink

from declaring without ambiguity his dedication to settlement throughout the "Land of Israel."

Soon after Begin's election, Nahum Goldman, chairman of the World Zionist Organization and a political foe, remarked, "[Begin] is the most honest of all the Israeli politicians I know. . . . The trouble has been that many Israelis didn't say what they wanted. Begin does. His election will determine the legitimacy of a policy of non-flexibility."

Begin wasted no time clarifying his objectives. An emissary dispatched to Washington explained that Arabs and Palestinians were amorphous abstractions without any legitimate claim to statehood in the Land of Israel, whose "reunification" under Israeli sovereignty offered Palestinians only "political and cultural self-determination" as a minority in the Jewish state.

Begin himself soon traveled to the wildcat West Bank settlement of Elon Moreh—an "outpost" in today's parlance—which elements in the just-defeated Rabin government patronized even as the prime minister condemned its consolidation. (Sound familiar?)

"There will be many more Elon Morehs," Begin declared. "Since May of this year, the name of these areas has been changed from *occupied* to *liberated* territories. This is liberated Israeli land, and we call on young volunteers in the country and the diaspora to come and settle here."

During the next decades, Israelis motivated by religious zeal and many

more others by a desire to improve their quality of life answered Begin's call. Numbering 10,000 when Begin assumed the premiership, the settler population of the West Bank (excluding settlers in annexed East Jerusalem) now approaches 300,000.

Sharon Settles

There was no mistaking Begin's intent, nor the parallel intentions of his principal settlement architect, Ariel Sharon, who served Begin, and then Yitzhak Shamir, in a number of key settlement-related posts. As a minister in Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet, Sharon returned to Israel from discussions with President Bill Clinton at the Wye Plantation in October 1996 admonishing "young volunteers" (many of whom were the children of Begin's settlement cadre) to "grab and settle" land throughout the West Bank, unleashing the most recent phase of new settlement creation. These so-called illegal outposts—the successors to the veteran settlements of Ofra, Elon Moreh (re-named Kedumim), Ma'ale Adumim, and numerous others—now number close to 100.

Sharon worked in the service of Likud governments, but his origins were in the bosom of Israel's Labor establishment—the party of David Ben Gurion, Golda Meir, and more recently, Yitzhak Rabin and Ehud Barak. If Begin is considered the settlement movement's cheerleader and most unabashed

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OLMERT, *continued on page 6*

TO OUR READERS

Israel achieved extraordinary success in its early decades. Today, it is in deep trouble because of its fateful decision after conquering the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza in 1967 to occupy, settle, and control these areas. As Geoffrey Aronson points out in this *Report*, for more than four decades Israeli governments have pursued this policy, withdrawing only from Gaza settlements, while proclaiming that they seek peace. Given the determination of the Palestinians for sovereignty in a real state of their own, their looming demographic advantage, and their proven capacity to inflict terror in the absence of a credible diplomatic process for an agreed territorial division, a policy of permanent occupation cannot succeed.

At best, Israel now offers the Palestinians a truncated statelet and no part of Jerusalem. At worst, it would cede only fragmented, scattered West Bank enclaves. Either option forecloses a viable Palestinian state and promises periodic violent Pales-

tinian rebellion. Israeli leaders' claims that security needs compel them to act unilaterally and that Palestinians have not shown that they can be trusted often conceal a higher priority: continued control and settlement of the land.

The lack of realism in this policy is remarkable. Israel's creation was the product of the unique and tragic suffering of the Jewish people for almost two millennia. But today, Israel is still subject to the constraints of nationhood that states ignore at their peril. Israel's settlement policy is a product of dysfunctional politics made worse by a pathology of denial and an excessive trust in force. No less important, Israel's policy persists because the indulgent protection of the United States has enabled it to avoid adopting the realistic policies that it needs to protect its long-term security and its identity as a Jewish, democratic state.



RICE TESTIFIES AT FOROPS SUBCOMMITTEE

On March 12, 2008, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice testified before the House Appropriations Committee's Foreign Operations Subcommittee regarding the FY09 Foreign Operations budget request.

McCollum (D-MN): . . . This week's announcement of the expanded Israeli settlements in the West Bank is a blow to your mission in that region. This expansion is unacceptable because it violates the road map. Madame Secretary, I'm looking for a clear, ambiguous (sic) position on continued Israeli settlement expansion. I want you to be explicit about this administration's position on the continued settlement expansion on the West Bank. And can you give me assurances that no U.S. funds in this budget will be used to facilitate or enable or secure the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank which violates the road map?

Rice: . . . The United States considers the expansion of settlement activity to be not consistent with Israeli obligations under the road map, and we've made that very clear. And I've also said that it's certainly not helpful to the peace process. There is a process that we've set up for dealing with road map obligations of both sides. General Fraser is going to hold that trilateral this week, and I can assure you that we are following very closely to assure that U.S. dollars are not being used to support the settlement activity. . . .

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The Foundation, a non-profit I.R.C. 501(c)(3) organization, supports peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians through mutual recognition and a negotiated division of historic Palestine. It publishes the bi-monthly *Report on Israeli Settlement in the Occupied Territories*.

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The map at right illustrates the broader territorial context of Israel's settlement program in the heart of East Jerusalem where land and land use are the central instruments of containment, control, and marginalization of the Palestinian community. Large-scale residential settlement, a key feature employed by Israel elsewhere in East Jerusalem in its effort to divide and contain the Palestinian community, anchors both the targeted small scale-settlement and the creation of open areas around and within areas of Palestinian habitation that are the key features of Israeli policy in this critical and sensitive area.

In the north, the structural cohesion of Palestinian neighborhoods like Sheikh Jarrah and Wadi Joz is eroded by a variety of means—the construction of Ma'alot Dafna in what was formerly no man's land, the placement of government offices and institutions, the creation of open or "green" spaces, and the establishment of small civilian settlement areas.

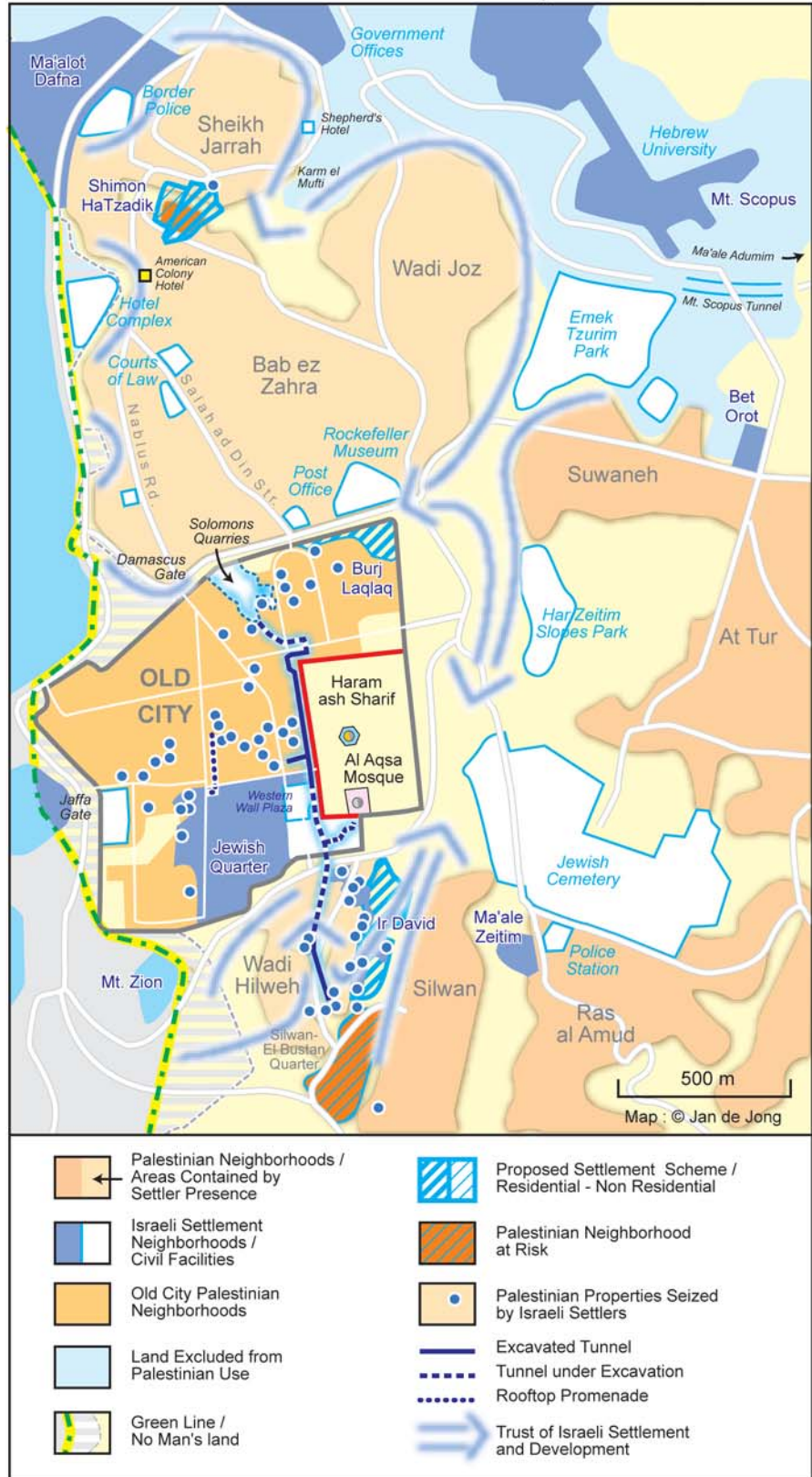
Isolation of this area from the Old City is visible in efforts to employ similar instruments along and within the northern perimeter of the Old City.

East of the Old City, the creation of parks and other civilian land uses effectively interrupts the linkage to both Sawaneh and At Tur, which are forced to look eastward for potential growth.

Within the Old City itself, the relatively large-scale re-creation of an enlarged Jewish Quarter anchors the effort to establish small but significant Jewish residential and institutional centers whose isolation from one another is, in part answered by the creation of passageways both under and above ground.

To the south, the expanding settlement of Ma'ale Zeitim, soon to include the site of the nearby police station (which itself is set to move to a new facility in the E-1 area), creates a key settlement anchor next to the Jewish cemetery on the Mt. of Olives. In Silwan, residential settlement and archeological/touristic institutions create a territorial bridge to the Western Wall, the Temple Mount, complete with underground access.

Containing Palestinian Neighborhoods in and around Jerusalem's Old City - 2008



SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

December 1 Settlers assault and injure a Palestinian man in Hebron's Old City. (OCHA)

West Bank settlers throw stones at a Palestinian boy and steal his donkey in the village of Tuba. (*Ha'aretz*)

December 2 Labor Party leader Ehud Barak announces support for legislation to compensate West Bank settlers east of the separation barrier who leave their homes voluntarily. (*Yedioth Aharonot*)

December 3 The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) impose a curfew on Kafr Qaddum village in an effort to disperse settlers from Kedumim attempting to enter the village. (OCHA)

December 4 Israel's Housing and Construction Ministry publishes tenders for the construction of 307 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Har Homa, home to approximately 4,000 settlers. (*Ha'aretz*)

Peace Now reports that the IDF has carried out 3 percent of the 3,449 demolition orders issued by the civil administration from 1997 to 2007 for illegally built structures in settlements and settlement outposts.

December 5 *Ha'aretz* reports that the registrar of nonprofit organizations has ordered Elad, an organization that purchases property in East Jerusalem for settlers, to reveal the identity of its donors because it had submitted questionable information.

Ha'aretz reports that settlers squatting in a Hebron house have submitted a petition to Israel's High Court of Justice to prevent their evacuation from the building.

The IDF imposes a closure on the Beit Sira village for seven hours following two incidents in which Palestinian youths threw stones and Molotov cocktails at settlers' vehicles traveling on Road 443. (OCHA)

December 6 Arutz 7 reports claims by settlers of the IDF conducting a large-scale operation to confiscate weapons from West Bank settlers not holding gun permits.

Palestinians throw stones at settlers' vehicles near Ariel, Karmeit Tzur, Ma'ale Amos, and Shilo. (Arutz 7)

December 8 *Ha'aretz* reports that among 400 settlers polled, 11 percent said they would relocate if offered compensation equal

to the value of their homes. If the government were to offer double the value of their property, 17 percent would relocate.

Israeli police remove dozens of people from a mock Palestinian outpost erected in the West Bank to protest Israel's ongoing settlement expansion. (*Ha'aretz*)

December 9 Settlers attempt to establish nine new outposts near settlements in Elon Moreh, Hashmonaim, Hebron, and Kochav Hashahar and march to a hilltop in the E-1 area. Police declared the sites closed military zones, but allowed marchers to pass and some to spend the night there. (*Ha'aretz*)

In Azzun village, a Palestinian boy is injured from plastic-coated metal bullets during confrontations between the IDF and stone throwers. A settler is injured by glass near Azzun village when Palestinians hit her car with stones and Molotov cocktails. A curfew is imposed on the village for fifteen hours. (OCHA)

December 12 Israeli security forces evict squatters in a new settlement outpost near Hebron. (*Ha'aretz*)

December 14 IDF soldiers and police attempt to evict settlers squatting in the evacuated settlement of Homesh. Four people were arrested. (Arutz 7)

Settlers gather on a bypass road near Bruqin village and throw stones at Palestinian houses and vehicles. (OCHA)

Kol Ha'Zeman reports on plans by the Interior Ministry to construct a ring road in East Jerusalem that would require land confiscations and the demolition of tens of houses along the route.

December 21 A settler is injured while driving on Road 55 near Qalqilya when Palestinians hit his car with rocks. (OCHA)

December 24 Settlers from Revava prevent a farmer from Dayr Istiya from accessing his land near the settlement. (OCHA)

December 25 Settlers from the Gilad outpost assault and injure three Palestinian men from Till village, near Nablus, as they cultivate their land. (OCHA)

December 26 A settler is injured near Bruqin village by Palestinians throwing stones at vehicles. (OCHA)

December 28 Two settlers from Kiryat Arba and a 22-year-old Palestinian man

from Hebron are killed near the settlement of Telem in an exchange of gunfire. (OCHA)

Settlers from Gush Etzion throwing stones break the window of a passing Palestinian taxi. (OCHA)

December 30 Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert directs the ministers of defense, housing and construction, and agriculture to obtain his authorization and that of Defense Minister Ehud Barak before moving forward with any new settlement projects. (*Ha'aretz*)

December 31 An Israeli municipal court orders eight Jewish families to evacuate a seven-storey building in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan because it was built illegally. (*Ha'aretz*)

Ma'ariv reports that 100 kilometers of the separation barrier route remain to be built. The state had recently allocated \$62 million to construct 25 kilometers of it.

Settlers from Gush Etzion throw stones at Palestinian taxis traveling on Road 60. (OCHA)

January 1 Settlers from Mattityahu, near Bil'in village, assault and injure three Palestinian men while attempting to place two caravans on land belonging to the village. (OCHA)

Settlers from Efrat set fire to a 700-year-old mosque near the village of al-Khadir, Bethlehem. (OCHA)

January 2 The IDF assaults and injures a Palestinian boy from al-Rihiya near the settlement of Haggai, Hebron. (OCHA)

January 3 In Fasayil, IDF soldiers demolish twelve residential tents and twelve barracks belonging to a Bedouin community of 80 people. (OCHA)

The IDF and Israeli police enter Bil'in to remove two housing units installed by settlers on January 1. (OCHA)

January 4 Five settlers from Abraham Avino, Hebron, stone and injure a Palestinian man from Masha village, Hebron. (OCHA)

Ha'aretz reports that the Housing and Construction Ministry intends to move forward with plans to construct more than 1,000 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Har Homa on absentee land belonging to Palestinians despite the opposi-

SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

tion of Attorney General Meni Mazuz and a promise to the United States not to invoke the absentee law in Jerusalem.

January 7 *Ha'aretz* reports that the Israel Police has delayed moving into a new building in the E-1 area near Jerusalem.

Ha'aretz reports the start of construction of 60 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Ras al-Amud.

January 14 Settlers from the Beit Hadassa settlement in Hebron throw Molotov cocktails into Palestinian homes. (*Ma'an News*)

January 17 *Ha'aretz* reports the Jerusalem Planning and Construction Committee's approval of the expansion of the women's section of the Wailing Wall bordering the Mughrabi Gate.

January 20 The Israeli Interior Ministry publishes population statistics indicating that

in 2007, the West Bank settler population grew by 5 percent, or 14,000 people, reaching 282,000. (*Yediot Aharonot*)

January 23 In response to an inquiry by Israel's High Court of Justice, the government declares its intention to evacuate the settlement outpost of Migron by August 2008. The outpost is built on private Palestinian land. (*Yediot Aharonot*)

The IDF returns 200 olive trees to a farmer from Qaryut. Settlers had stolen 300 olive trees from the farmer in June 2007. (OCHA)

January 24 Two Palestinians from the town of Beit Umar infiltrate the settlement of Gush Etzion and stab two settlers before they are killed by settlers. (OCHA)

January 25 One Palestinian man is killed and four are injured in Beit Umar after the IDF opens fire on participants in a funeral

of one of the Palestinians killed the day before in Gush Etzion. (OCHA)

Palestinians throwing rocks injure a family of four settlers traveling by car near the town of Beit Umar along the Jerusalem-Hebron highway. (Arutz 7)

January 30 Settler youths from Kiryat Arba assault and injure two Palestinian boys walking on the Kiryat Arba road. (OCHA)

Arutz 7 reports that settlers squatting in a Palestinian building under contention in Hebron have been allowed by the Industry, Trade and Labor Ministry to install permanent windows.

January 31 IDF soldiers assault a 37-year-old Palestinian man from Izbet al-Tabib as he works his land near the separation barrier in Qalqilya. (OCHA)

SHORT TAKES

Post-Annapolis East Jerusalem Construction

Tenders for 440 units in East Jerusalem's East Talpiot settlement were announced by the Israel Land Authority on January 1, 2008. The Housing and Construction Ministry announced the approval of 307 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Har Homa on December 1, 2007. Plans to build another 1,000 apartments on absentee lands in stage 3 of the Har Homa settlement have been approved by the Jerusalem municipal planning board. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert approved the construction of 750 homes in the West Bank settlement of Givat Ze'ev on March 8, 2008. Approximately 50 units have been approved in the Gilo settlement since the Annapolis conference.

Peace Now, "Jerusalem Settlements Take Center Stage," *Settlements in Focus*, February 2008

Har Homa: Despite the Headlines, Construction Boom Continues

Jerusalem's Har Homa [settlement] has appeared in many headlines lately. In the past week, tenders were published for the construction of 307 housing units in Har Homa, causing tensions between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. . . . In Israel's view, Har Homa is within the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem and therefore Israeli law applies to it. Construction, therefore, is legal. . . . Despite the controversy over Har Homa, it appears that this has not hurt construction or apartment sales in the [settlement]. The new project includes five

apartment buildings of apartments of 3, 4, and 5 rooms. Each apartment will have a garden and balcony.

Jerusalem Real Estate Magazine, January 2008

Palestinian Land Owners of Homesh Will Be Awarded Millions

The state of Israel is expected to pay tens of millions of shekels to twenty Palestinian landowners who have requested compensation for Israel's use of their private land over the years to construct the settlement of Homesh, which was evacuated in the 2005 disengagement. The landowners have asked for 40 million shekels and to return to their land, and the state of Israel is interested in reaching an settlement with them in order to prevent legal proceedings.

The plaintiffs are Palestinian landowners from Burqa village and the land in question is private land that was confiscated by the IDF for security purposes. These security confiscation orders do not change the ownership of the land, but are intended for temporary security purposes. When the orders expire, the land is supposed to revert to the owner and monetary compensation for the use of the land is to be paid. Until now, there have only been a few cases where Palestinians filed petitions in order to receive monetary compensation. The reason for this is that receiving money from Israel can be misconstrued as a sale of the land.

Barak Ravid, *Ha'aretz*, January 13, 2008

advocate, Sharon, and by extension Israel's Labor establishment from Levi Eshkol to Barak, was its most effective contractor. It is not for nothing that one of the truisms of Israel's occupation is "Labor announces one settlement and builds ten, while the Likud announces ten and builds one."

Cry and Build

While Sharon was a child of Israel's Labor establishment, Olmert was born and bred in Begin's Likud. Indeed, for most of his political career, Olmert, anointed as one of the Likud "princes" who would some day inherit Begin's mantle, placed himself on Begin's right-wing, voting, most notably, against Begin's path-breaking peace treaty with Egypt.

As premier, however, Olmert has adopted the "cry and build" persona preferred by his predecessors in the Labor Party. Indeed, in important respects he has outflanked his predecessors in Labor from the left. Rabin, for example, never would have dreamed of declaring, as has Olmert, the creation of a Palestinian state to be a vital *Israeli* interest. Yet despite such sentiments, like his Labor predecessors, Olmert presides over settlement policies that, contrary to the spirit of his public pronouncements, continue to advance creeping annexation on the ground.

For example, settlers decry any suggestion of a reduced commitment to their welfare as a "freeze" on settlements. They need not worry, explained Eitan Broshi, assistant minister of defense for settlement affairs. "There is no policy of 'drying out' the settlements. There is a policy of caution with regard to the use of broader discretion regarding construction permits. Over the past three months, the minister of defense approved several construction matters in the territories, and these will also be implemented in coming months. Priority," he explained, "is being given to Jerusalem, the Etzion bloc, and settlements located in settlements blocs"—the latter defined by Israel as those areas about which President George W. Bush, in a 2004 letter to then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, acknowledged Israel's intent to annex.

These are not empty words. Olmert has specifically excluded the settlement neighborhoods in East Jerusalem from any freeze. The newspaper *Kol Ha'Zeman* reports that "in the

framework of efforts to *expand* construction, the Jerusalem municipality is undertaking intensive discussions with the Israel Land Authority to 'liberate' public land for the immediate construction of new housing. In coming months tenders for construction of 750 apartments in Pisgat Ze'ev . . . can be expected." Since the November 2007 Annapolis conference, tenders for the construction of 400 units in East Talpiot, 300 in Har Homa, and 50 in Gilo have already been announced. Uri Lupiansky, mayor of Jerusalem, recently said that the city is moving forward with plans for the construction of 10,000 housing units in East Jerusalem settlements.

Minister without Portfolio Haim Ramon, who has established himself as Olmert's stalking horse on settlement policy and who heads a committee charged with solving the outposts issue, explained that his committee sees its mandate not so much as removing unauthorized settlements but rather to facilitate settlement construction wherever "it is not politically significant." Indeed, draft recommendations by Israel's Justice Ministry will enable continuing construction not only in recognized settlements but also in unauthorized ones as well. Most problematic are new settlements sited on what Israel acknowledges to be private Palestinian land. These number at least one-third of 100 existing outposts.

Linking Elon Moreh to Migron

Begin's decision to legalize Elon Moreh was challenged by a 1979 High Court decision voiding the creation of civilian Jewish settlement on private Palestinian West Bank land in the absence of a secu-

urity justification. The settlers of Elon Moreh simply moved to a new location nearby—Kedumim, today a settlement of 3,400. Elon Moreh itself was reincarnated as a settlement of 1,300 on a hilltop overlooking Nablus.

The Israeli court's prohibition of this type of land theft, however, did not stop the practice of taking what even Israel recognizes as private Palestinian land for Israeli settlement, as today's outpost phenomenon demonstrates. Peace Now reports that almost 75 percent of the wildcat settlements established since 1996 are built in part on private Palestinian-owned land that was taken by settlers without any confiscation order.

Lying to Oneself

Speaking to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, [Israeli prime minister Ehud] Olmert said, "We must decide if we are interested in a serious peace process or simply want to perfume ourselves with self-righteousness, causing Hamas to arise in the West Bank."

He said the government's policy will be to continue to strike at Hamas, "which is uninterested in any structure of understanding with us, and to continue with diplomatic negotiations with the [Palestinian] Authority."

"The diplomatic horizon is what affords us the elementary right to self-defense," Olmert declared.

Referring to Israeli fears that Hamas will take over the West Bank as it did the Gaza Strip, Olmert added that "there is no way to prevent the process of Gazaization of the West Bank without proposing a diplomatic horizon."

"Whoever fails to see that, is simply lying to himself."

Ha'aretz, March 3, 2008

Migron Founders—Government Okayed, Funded Settlement

The Migron outpost, which the state promised the High Court of Justice to dismantle by August, was established with the encouragement of former prime minister Ariel Sharon and the approval of then-defense minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, two of Migron's founders have told *Ha'aretz*. As the High Court hearing on Migron resumes today, members of the outpost plan to argue that it was built on land purchased in part by Jews, contrary to the state's announcement that it was private Palestinian land. Palestinians who claim ownership of the outpost land petitioned the High Court, along with the Peace Now movement. In its much-delayed reply to the petition, the state told the court last month that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Ehud Barak have decided to remove the outpost by August.

The state's reply says Migron was built on Palestinian land. But the two Migron founders, Itai Harel and Shuki Sat, as well as outpost secretary Avi Tekslar claim that half of Migron's lands were bought by Jews through the El Watan company, which is controlled by Migron residents. Harel and Sat also maintain that Sharon knew about the outpost's establishment. Sat says that in 2002 Sharon complained to settler leaders that the outpost's trailers were not placed at the highest point on the hill, and during official discussions even said that "Migron is a clear example of an outpost that has strategic importance from a security standpoint—one that must not be removed." Sat and Harel present documents purportedly demonstrating that in 2002 and 2003 Ben-Eliezer approved the process of planning and permits for Migron, including moving forward on buying land there, which the settlers initiated, as well as steps to include Migron in the jurisdiction of the nearby settlement Kochav Yaakov. . . .

The rural building administration for the Jerusalem district (a branch of the Housing and Construction Ministry) transferred more than \$1 million for setting up Migron's infrastructure—including water, electricity and sewage—and another \$200,000 for building a synagogue, day care center and kindergarten. The [documents] also contain the detailed master plan for Migron as a neighborhood of 500 housing units on 890 dunams of land. This plan was prepared and paid for by the Housing Ministry, and states that the landholder is the Custodian of Absentee Property in Judea and Samaria.

Nadav Shargai, *Ha'aretz*,
February 5, 2008

The Legacy of Elon Moreh

A recent report by Israel's civil administration acknowledges that more than one-third of well-established West Bank settlements, where tens of thousands of Israelis reside, are built on private Palestinian land that was "temporarily" seized by military order for security purposes. According to a report in *Ha'aretz*, "a security source termed this a 'difficult statistic' that is liable to cause trouble for Israel both in Washington and its own courts." The article notes that most of this land was privately owned by Palestinians. In addition to Ariel, Efrat and Kiryat Arba—three of the largest West Bank settlements—the list also includes settlements in the West Bank heartland favored by Sharon—Beit El, Elon Moreh, Karnei Shomron, Kedumim, Ofra, Psagot, and Shilo and the Jordan Valley settlements of Gitit and Mechora. At least 19 of the 44 settlements on the civil administration's list were established after 1979, violating at least the spirit of the Elon Moreh decision and a government policy that based settlement expansion exclusively on "state land."

Ha'aretz noted that, "the Israel Defense Forces explained that its land seizure orders are in force until they are canceled. In some of these settlements, part or all of [the land] was declared 'state land' at the same time, but the seizure orders have not been canceled, either partially or totally." It added that "in general, seizure orders have not been used to build settlements since 1979," but "in the early 1980s, Nahal [an army unit] outposts were still built on the basis of seizure orders, and some later became settlements. There were also isolated cases during those years in which land was seized for roads or buildings for existing settlements."

A deal in the works between settlers and Defense Minister Ehud Barak will trade the evacuation of some outposts for increased settlement construction elsewhere. Prominent among these is Migron, a wildcat settlement of sixty families that Olmert has promised to evacuate by August.

Ha'aretz has reported that "a new neighborhood comprising 27 trailers is currently under construction at the settlement of Eli, north of Ramallah, even though Prime Minister Ehud Olmert vowed publicly after the Annapolis conference that any such building would cease."

These facts prompted a *Ha'aretz* editorial on January 9, 2008, declaring that "there is no meaning to the Bush visit or to Olmert's talks with Mahmoud Abbas as long as the facts on the ground . . . clearly demonstrate the lack of credibility of the government's declarations, and the cooperation that it receives from the American government with this policy."

Olmert's lofty sentiments highlighting the need for a change in the status quo pale against the continuing commitment of Israel's central security, legal, administrative, and political institutions to the policy, now almost four decades old, of creeping annexation. The prime minister's comments are as yet little more than a public relations sedative to mask Israel's continuing commitment to Greater Israel. ♦

SETTLEMENT CONSTRUCTION

New housing sales in Israel increased nationally by 1.6 percent in 2007, but sales in Tel Aviv and the West Bank decreased by 6.5 percent and 8.1 percent, respectively. A total of 13,576 new apartments built by the private construction sector were sold in 2007, marking the fourth year of rising housing sales. Of the apartments sold, 2.7 percent were in West Bank settlements.

The Marker, January 30, 2008

Year	Area	Housing		New Dwelling Units Sold ^b
		Starts ^a	Completions ^a	
2007	Israel	26,740	25,851	13,734
	West Bank	478	1,429	372
2006	Israel	30,352	30,427	11,941
	West Bank	575	1,259	405
2005	Israel	31,721	32,879	11,998
	West Bank & Gaza	889	1,147	657
2004	Israel	30,102	33,480	10,716
	West Bank & Gaza	1,023	1,511	609
2003	Israel	31,830	34,701	12,174
	West Bank & Gaza	1,266	1,161	411
2002	Israel	33,519	38,700	12,136
	West Bank & Gaza	993	858	239
2001	Israel	32,010	39,264	11,643
	West Bank & Gaza	807	1,180	733
2000	Israel	46,103	43,516	13,850
	West Bank & Gaza	3,023	1,429	667

a. Initiated by the Housing and Construction Ministry.

b. Privately-sponsored construction

Source: Israeli Housing and Construction Ministry.

West Bank and East Jerusalem Settlement Tenders

January-March 2008: 1,190 housing units

2007: 415 housing units

2006: 952 housing units

2005: 1,184 housing units

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As far as we are concerned, we shall not stop the negotiations because we want to reach a solution. If we reach a solution, it will certainly be in the interest of our people. What is the solution? The solution is to stop the settlements and attacks, to retrieve the West Bank and Jerusalem, to find a fair solution to the problem of the refugees. This is the solution. Therefore, it is in our interest to reach a solution. We will not go all the way to the table of negotiations and stop. We know that they [Israel] are the ones who will stop negotiations, not us.

Even if they continue their violations, we are forced to continue the dialogue. If we do not continue with the dialogue, they are the winners, not us.

In my opinion—I don't know what would satisfy them—but what satisfies me is the solution that is in line with international legitimacy. I cannot accept less than this and do not demand more than this. I am not demanding more than what international legitimacy offers, but I cannot accept anything less than that.

This is what I want. If Israel wants a solution through which it can live in the Arab and Islamic world, then it has to accept this. Imagine what it would mean if Israel accepts to withdraw from the Arab and Palestinian territories. According to the Arab initiative, the Arab and Islamic countries will normalize their relations with Israel. This means that Israel will live in a sea of peace from Mauritania all the way to Indonesia.

Peace is not an opportunity for the Palestinian people alone. It is an opportunity for Israel also. I hope that they understand this and [do] not miss this opportunity, which perhaps is more in their interest than in ours. But let me just say that we both have a single equal interest; we have an interest and they have an interest in establishing this peace.

Interview with PLO Chairman and PA President
Mahmoud Abbas, Ramallah Palestinian Satellite TV,
February 12, 2008

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