

REPORT ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENT IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

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MOVING BEYOND A SETTLEMENT FREEZE

By *Geoffrey Aronson*

The administration of Barack Obama is setting the stage for the resumption of talks, if not necessarily formal negotiations, between Israeli and Palestinian leaders. Washington hopes that a tripartite fall meeting of President Barack Obama, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and PLO chairman Mahmoud Abbas will mark the inauguration of a new phase in Obama's Middle East policy.

If Obama succeeds, the negotiations may be headlined by an Annapolis-like summit conference that Russia and others are vying to host, leading to a resumption of bilateral talks aimed, according to U.S. officials, at "advancing a two-state solution where Israelis and Palestinians can live side by side in their own states with peace and security." To embark on this effort, however, Obama must move beyond the diplomatic effort led during the last three months by his special envoy George Mitchell to win from Israel the imposition of a complete cessation of settlement expansion in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and tangible demonstrations of normalization with Israel from the Arab world.

It was Obama's decision to place settlements at the heart of his administra-

tion's opening diplomatic effort. Highlighting settlements and Arab confidence building measures as the twin points of engagement was understood by the Obama team as the policy option most likely to impress upon Israelis and Palestinians, as well as the international community, the intention and the ability of the new American leadership to end occupation, create a Palestinian state, and normalize Israel's place in the region. Obama seized the policy initiative by declaring in Cairo "the illegitimacy of continued Israeli settlements." Washington's demand for a settlement freeze overshadowed Netanyahu's effort to focus on "economic peace" and the interwoven crises between Israel and Hamas in Gaza that dominated the agenda before Obama's inauguration. The new president won a quick affirmation from Netanyahu in support of the principle (if not the content) of a two-state solution and boosted Palestinian confidence that recognition of their oft-repeated demand for imposition of a settlement freeze was at last in sight.

Netanyahu's anticipated response to U.S. demands will not meet this test. Israel is prepared, at most, to impose a temporary moratorium on certain types of settlement expansion, an action similar to restrictions agreed to by Menachem Begin in 1977. It will complete more than 3,000 new dwellings in West Bank settlements, enough to increase the settler population of 500,000 by 12,000, and exclude East Jerusalem from any building limitations. Such an outcome, after months of high-powered

U.S. diplomacy, risks being seen as conferring an ambiguous U.S. "stamp of approval" and further evidence of the inability of diplomacy to challenge the settlement enterprise. Despite the failure to win a credible suspension of all settlement activity, Obama still commands the international arena and he retains a powerful ability and interest in setting the terms of Arab-Israeli diplomacy. A vigorous American effort that supercedes the spurned demand for a comprehensive settlement freeze appears to be the White House's next move.

The Unrequited Demand for a Settlement Freeze

The complete cessation of all facets of settlement activity everywhere, defined by Secretary of State Hilary Rodham Clinton as "a stop to the settlements. Not some settlements, not outposts, not natural growth exceptions," remains Washington's stated policy. This demand is the standard for success against which Obama's settlement policies is being judged, by those who wish the new president well and by others who want to empty Obama's two state vision, and the necessity of massive settlement evacuation, of real content.

Leading Arab commentator Abdul Rahman al Rashid noted in *Sharq al Awsat* on July 8, 2009,

"The battle to stop the [Israeli] construction of settlements is a personal battle for Obama, and one that will reveal whether the U.S. president is

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TO OUR READERS

As this issue reports, the Obama administration hopes to shift the U.S. diplomatic agenda from the quest for a comprehensive settlement freeze to long-awaited negotiations on final status issues with American mediation. This means that the U.S. will be obliged to offer policy proposals to reconcile polarized Israeli and Palestinian views on the issues that must be resolved to define peace and a Palestinian state: borders, settlements, Jerusalem, security and refugees.

By dealing with borders, negotiations will subsume the freeze issue and address settlement evacuation, land swaps, and the ultimate status of Jerusalem. Such negotiations would confront and define the issues of the settlement blocs that Israel hopes to annex. Among these are Ariel in the central northern West Bank, others that surround and virtually cut off Arab East Jerusalem, such as Maale Adumim and the proposed E-1 bloc, which almost splits the West Bank in half; and Hebron in the heart of

the southern West Bank. A Palestinian state without these areas would be truncated, non-contiguous, economically non-viable, and deprived of critical water sources that some of these settlements and their satellites dominate. The Palestinians would be most unlikely to accept this outcome.

The U.S. as mediator will face a choice of dealing with final status issues individually or with a comprehensive plan. An integrated approach has the strong advantage of defining an outcome in a way that is credible and compelling to both sides by demonstrating the advantages to each of the otherwise painful tradeoffs they must make in return for peace that meets the fundamental needs of both. Whatever the format, the negotiating agenda is formidable, but the stakes could not be higher for Israelis, Palestinians and Americans.

Philip C. Wilcox, Jr.

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AMERICAN NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION RAISES FUNDS FOR SETTLEMENT

American Friends of Ateret Cohanim, a nonprofit organization that sends millions of shekels worth of donations to Israel every year for clearly political purposes, such as buying Arab properties in East Jerusalem, is registered in the United States as an organization that funds educational institutes in Israel.

The U.S. tax code enables nonprofits to receive tax-exempt status if they engage in educational, charitable, religious or scientific activity. However, such organizations are forbidden to engage in any political activity. The latter is broadly defined as any action, even the promotion of certain ideas, that could have a political impact.

Land Purchases in East Jerusalem

Financing land purchases in East Jerusalem would, therefore, seem to violate the organization's tax-exempt status.

Daniel Luria, chief fund-raiser for Ateret Cohanim in Israel, told *Ha'aretz* Sunday that the American organization's registration as an educational entity stemmed from tax considerations.

"We are an umbrella organization that engages in redeeming land," he said. "Our [fund-raising] activity in New York goes solely toward land redemption."

Although Ateret Cohanim also operates a yeshiva, Ateret Yerushalayim, in the Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City, fund-raising for the yeshiva is handled by a different organization: American Friends of Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim.

Fundraising in the U.S.

American Friends of Ateret Cohanim was founded in New York in 1987. Like all tax-exempt organizations, it must file detailed annual returns with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. An examination reveals that the organization describes its "primary exempt purpose" as: "provid[ing] funding for higher educational institutes in Israel."

"That's because of the tax issue," Luria said, explaining that due to American law, the American Friends organization "has to be connected in some fashion with educational matters."

He also estimated that 60 percent of Ateret Cohanim's money is raised in the U.S.

The Friends organization's most recent return, filed in 2008 for fiscal 2007, shows that it raised \$2.1 million in donations that year. Of this, \$1.6 million was transferred to Ateret Cohanim in Israel.

The remainder was used to cover administrative overhead, including fund-raising expenses and an \$80,000 salary for Shoshana Hikind, the American organization's vice president and de facto director, whose husband, Dov, is a New York state assemblyman and well-known supporter of the Israeli right.

The organization also raised substantial sums in previous years: \$1.3 million in 2006, \$900,000 in 2005 and about \$2 million in 2004.

By comparison, American Friends of Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim raised only \$189,000 in 2007.

In its IRS returns, American Friends of Ateret Cohanim said its purpose is to "promote, publicize" and "raise funds for" Ateret Cohanim institutions in Israel. These institutions, it continued, "encourage and promote study and observance of Jewish religious traditions and culture."

Redeeming the Land

In reality, Ateret Cohanim in Israel focuses mainly on purchasing Arab property in East Jerusalem. Since its founding in the 1970s, it has bought dozens of Arab buildings for Jews. Just this April, for instance, it moved Jewish families

into an Arab house it purchased in the Muslim Quarter.

One noteworthy donor to its Friends organization is casino magnate Irving Moskowitz, a well-known supporter of rightist causes, who also owns the Shepherd Hotel in East Jerusalem. That hotel made headlines recently when Moskowitz obtained a permit to build 20 apartments for Jews there, sparking angry protests from the U.S. government.

In response, Ateret Cohanim chairman Mati Dan insisted that the Friends organization "is an independent organization that decides for itself whom to fund." Moreover, he added, "we engage in education constantly . . . I don't know what Daniel Luria told you, but we are active in the field of [educational] institutions."

Uri Blau, with Nir Hasson,
Ha'aretz, August 17, 2009

Moskowitz has invested extensive funds in setting up small enclaves within Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. The population he settles and subsidizes does not come to live, it comes to establish political facts on the ground. Is it conceivable, Netanyahu asked yesterday, that Jews not be permitted to settle in parts of New York or Washington? This is a hypocritical, sanctimonious statement. A Jew who settles in the Bronx or in Queens lives in peace and happiness under the American flag. Moskowitz's Jews will live under the shadow of the IDF's bayonets. They are not coming as tenants; they are coming as landlords.

Nahum Barnea,
Yediot Abaronot, July 20, 2009

SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

June 29 The Israeli government presents its plan to the High Court of Justice to build 50 housing units in the settlement of Adam for families slated to be evacuated from the Migron outpost. (*Ha'aretz*)

July 1 The Palestinian Authority (PA) accuses Israel of planning to claim another 2 percent of West Bank land. Israeli Defense Ministry sources say that the land in question was once under the waters of the Dead Sea but has since been exposed by the sea's steady decline. (*Ha'aretz*)

Ma'ariv reports Israeli defense minister Ehud Barak as having told U.S. Middle East envoy George Mitchell, "In 2000, I was the Israeli prime minister that made the boldest steps to attain peace, and in that year there was the most Israeli construction in the territories." (See table on page 8.)

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) remove the Hawara roadblock, one of the busiest in the West Bank, south of Nablus. Soldiers will remain at the site but will not search Palestinians. (*Ma'ariv*)

Palestinians enter the yeshiva of the Homesh settlement, which was evacuated by the Israeli government in 2005, and burn dozens of books of the Talmud and other Jewish texts. Following the raid, Homesh leader Yossi Dagan demands that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu substantially expand Homesh in response to the "desecration and national humiliation." (Arutz 7)

According to a Peace Now report, Israeli government funding for a private security firm protecting settlers in East Jerusalem Arab neighborhoods more than doubled during the preceding 10 years. The current amount exceeds \$14 million annually. (*Jerusalem Post*)

July 2 The Jerusalem municipality approves plans for 20 housing units in the Shepherd Hotel compound in the Palestinian neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, in East Jerusalem. The hotel, owned by settlement financier Irwin Moscovitz, will be demolished to accommodate the dwellings. (*Ma'ariv*)

July 6 During talks in London, Defense Minister Barak promises U.S. envoy George Mitchell that the evacuation of 23 outposts will occur "in weeks or months, not in years." Contrary to Barak's claim, the Netanyahu government informs the Israeli High Court that it plans to grant an exten-

sion to allow settlers in the Migron outpost to remain there for another year. (*Yediot Abaronot*) (See story on page 7.)

July 9 Eighty right wing activists enter the evacuated settlement of Homesh to bury the remains of Torah scrolls that had been burned on July 1. (Israel Radio)

July 12 Israeli police give the Samaria Regional Council a list of 11 illegal settlement structures slated for demolition, including at Bracha, Itamar, Rehelim, and Yitzhar. (Israel Radio)

July 13 *Yediot Abaronot* reports on the firing of Uzi Keren, special advisor on settlement issues. Keren was appointed by former prime minister Ariel Sharon and continued to serve under Ehud Olmert. Prime Minister Netanyahu is reportedly considering head of the Yesha Council Pinhas Wallerstein to replace Keren.

July 14 The High Court of Justice rules that the home of Major Roi Klein, a decorated Golani Brigade deputy battalion commander killed in the 2006 Lebanon war, should be evacuated and demolished. Peace Now had petitioned the court, arguing that Klein's house, along with eleven others in the Eli settlement, had been built illegally. (*Ma'ariv*)

Settlers destroy dozens of olive trees when they set fire to 25 dunams of land belonging to farmers in Burqa village. (*Ma'an News*)

Ha'aretz reports the dropping of charges against Ze'ev Braude, a settler from Kiryat Arba who was filmed on December 4, 2008, shooting three Palestinians from the al Matariyeh family in Hebron.

July 15 Israeli authorities destroy a Palestinian home in Beit Hanina and a residence in Silwan on the grounds that the dwellings were built without permits. (*al-Hayat al-Jadida*)

Settlers from Bat Ayin burn 150 dunams of land belonging to Palestinian farmers from Beit Ummar. (*al-Hayat al-Jadida*)

July 16 Responding to U.S. State Department pressure to stop Israeli construction in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem, Israeli internal security minister Yitzhak Aharonovich states, "Jerusalem is a unified city; its municipal borders are clear to all the people of Israel and the entire world; and where it is possible to build, and

there are proper permits issued by the municipality and the state, there will be construction." (Army Radio)

July 20 The settlement division of the World Zionist Organization (WZO) announces plans to transfer approximately \$8 million to West Bank settlements. (Army Radio)

Israeli civil administration authorities and border police evacuate and demolish several buildings at the Adei Ad, Nofei Yarden, and Mitzpe Danny outposts. In response, settlers set fire to land belonging to Palestinians from Burin and Asira al-Kabaliya, in the Yitzhar area, destroying at least 1,500 olive trees. (*Yediot Abaronot, Ha'aretz*)

Settlers throw stones at Palestinians traveling near the Hawara checkpoint, near Nablus. (*Yediot Abaronot*)

July 21 Stone-throwing settlers injure an IDF soldier, and settlers damage 10 Palestinian cars near Kedumim. (Israel Radio)

Settlers cut down 40 olive trees belonging to Palestinians from Burin, near the Yitzhar settlement. (*Ha'aretz*)

July 23 Dozens of settlers fire tear-gas canisters into Palestinian homes in Asira al-Qibliya, south of Nablus. (*Ma'an News*)

July 27 Arutz 7 reports the construction of 11 new West Bank outposts by settler youth. Security forces tear down two of them.

In Jerusalem, a crowd of approximately 2,000 people gather in front of the U.S. consulate to protest pressure by the Obama administration to freeze settlement construction. (*Ha'aretz*)

July 28 Israeli security forces prevent settlers from erecting an outpost near Efrat. (Army Radio)

July 29 The Israeli High Court allows settlers to renovate the seized home of the Palestinian Hijazi family in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, in East Jerusalem. (*al-Quds*)

July 30 On Tisha B'av, a day of fasting when Jews mourn the destruction of the Temple some 2,000 years ago, the Temple Institute begins building a sacrificial altar in the Mitzpe Yericho settlement. The institute plans to transport the altar to the Temple Mount when it is completed. (Arutz 7)

U.S. STATEMENTS ON A SETTLEMENT FREEZE

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

September 4, 2009

Statement by the Press Secretary on Israeli Settlements

We regret the reports of Israel's plans to approve additional settlement construction [announced by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu earlier in the day]. Continued settlement activity is inconsistent with Israel's commitment under the Roadmap.

As the President has said before, the United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued settlement expansion and we urge that it stop. We are working to create a climate in which negotiations can take place, and such actions make it harder to create such a climate.

We do appreciate Israel's stated intent to place limits on settlement activity and will continue to discuss this with the Israelis as these limitations are defined.

The U.S. commitment to Israel's security is and will remain unshakeable. We believe it can best be achieved through comprehensive peace in the region, including a two-state solution with a Palestinian state living side by side in peace with Israel.

That is the ultimate goal to which the President is deeply and personally committed.

Our objective remains to resume meaningful negotiations as soon as possible in pursuit of this goal. We are working with all parties—Israelis, Palestinians, and Arab states—on the steps they must take to achieve that objective.

State Department Daily Briefing

Washington, DC

September 4, 2009

Question: On the settlements, were you caught kind of blindsided by this? [H]ave the Israelis been discussing the fact that as you're negotiating a settlement freeze, they're going to announce the approval of new settlements?

Mr. Kelly: Well, you know that we don't want to get too much into detail of our confidential diplomatic conversations. What I'll say in response to that is that we have had a very open dialogue with our Israeli partners. And Senator Mitchell on multiple occasions has had a thorough discussion of all of these issues. We've made our position quite clear. Our position is that all sides have to abide by their obligations under the Roadmap. And of course, for the Israelis, that means a

stop to settlement activity. And you saw the statement out of the White House that we regret that they are planning to do this. . . .

Question: Did Mitchell not tell the Israelis that if they went ahead and did this, that they were going to get slapped? . . . The bottom line is that he knew this was coming.

Mr. Kelly: [W]e have a very open dialogue with our friends in Israel.

Question: Well, aren't they—come on, aren't they like spitting on you, the fact that you're negotiating an agreement for a settlement freeze, and here they talk about announcing new settlements. I mean, doesn't that just fly in the face of what you say that you want and what the Israelis say that they're working on with you? I mean, that's ridiculous.

Mr. Kelly: No, we're partners. We have a good dialogue, an excellent relationship.

Question: It doesn't sound like it.

Mr. Kelly: They're open about their interests. We're open about our interests. And we're all being clear here. . . .

Question: [H]ave you taken a step back, though? I mean, there was all this hope that you were going to have a launch of negotiations at UNGA [UN General Assembly]. Is this a step back?

Mr. Kelly: I wouldn't say that at all.

Question: So that means you're saying that it's okay?

Question: So this is a positive development?

Mr. Kelly: Oh, I wouldn't call it a positive development. I didn't say that.

Question: But if it's not a step back and it's—and you regret it, well. . . .

Mr. Kelly: What's going on now is we were having very intense discussions with all the parties involved. Right now, we're focusing on our discussion with the Israeli officials. We talk very frankly and they talk very frankly, and—but this is, I think, part of the whole process of our discussions. We're being clear, they're being clear.

Question: It sounds like they are completely ignoring you. That's what it sounds like. You want a settlement freeze and they're building more settlements. . . .

Question: What's the point of [Mitchel] going [to Israel] if they're just going to defy you?

Mr. Kelly: I just said the process continues. [N]othing has stopped because of announcements. ♦

“As the President has said before, the United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued settlement expansion and we urge that it stop. We are working to create a climate in which negotiations can take place, and such actions make it harder to create such a climate.”

**White House Press Secretary,
September 4, 2009**

capable of dealing with the larger issues, such as [Israeli Palestinian] negotiations over territory, borders, Jerusalem, refugees and disarmament. This will also clarify whether Obama will be able to force the parties to follow through on whatever agreement they make. Everybody is monitoring the battle with regards to the Israeli settlements, and construction is ongoing. So long as settlement building continues under the pretext of expansion and vertical construction, nobody in the region will believe that Obama is capable of handling these weighty issues.”

Obama is proving no more successful than his predecessors in winning a complete freeze, and he has been stung by Netanyahu’s ability to re-frame Washington’s demand as a challenge to Israel’s presence in East Jerusalem. By the end of July, Washington found itself engaged in detailed discussions of the minutiae of settlement construction and expansion. U.S. negotiators asserted that the talks were aimed at closing settlement expansion “loopholes.” Israeli leaders, initially stunned by Obama’s demands, were also confident. They had concluded that Obama’s “bark was worse than his bite.” The potential for a crisis in relations over settlements had been averted and the evolving terms of a limited settlement moratorium were well within manageable limits. In a reflection of this cold-blooded Israeli view, Israeli columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on August 14, “Defense Minister Ehud Barak was the honey trap and special envoy George Mitchell took the bait. . . . He is now negotiating over the [settlement moratorium’s] timetable, the conditions, the numbers and the exit points.”

Arab visitors to Washington from Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia offered equally insistent advice about the shortcomings of the administration’s pursuit of a settlement freeze, calling for renewed diplomacy on ending the occupation and creating a Palestinian state. In a July 31 press conference with Clinton, Saudi foreign minister Prince Saud al-Faisal stated,

“Incrementalism and a step by step approach has not and we believe will not achieve peace. Temporary security, confidence building measures will also not bring peace. What is required is a comprehensive approach that defines the final outcome at the outset and launches into negotiations over final status issues: borders, Jerusalem, water, refugees and security.”

As the summer wore on Obama himself grew visibly impatient with seemingly interminable discussions on a settlement

freeze that were now delaying the opening of much anticipated negotiations. Having declared the status quo “unsustainable,” Obama was anxious to move off what he himself acknowledged was “the rut that we’re in currently.”

Beyond a Settlement Freeze

A meeting with Netanyahu and Abbas would be Washington’s first achievement in moving beyond a narrow discussion of a settlement freeze to Obama’s strategic objective of a final status agreement in which settlement evacuation stands to feature prominently. Israel’s leaders are well aware that they will face this challenge. To meet it, they are continuing efforts begun by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to reach bilateral understandings with Washington on Israel’s long-term security requirements in the West Bank and elsewhere. To this end, Netanyahu and Barak have presented their six point political-security agenda: recognition of the state of Israel, resolution of

the refugee problem outside Israel, an end to Palestinian and Arab claims as part of the end to the conflict, effective demilitarization, and international recognition of the demilitarization arrangements. “As long as we unite behind these conditions,” declared Netanyahu on July 28, “the chance of implementing them increases, because the international community respects a clear, solid, logical and just stance.”

Alone among the participants, Abbas is conditioning a renewal of diplomatic contacts on a complete cessation of settlement expansion. He has asserted control over both the fractious Fatah movement and the moribund PLO and looks to polls that show improvement in the contest with Hamas. Now more

than ever Washington and Abu Mazen believe that a “strengthened” Abu Mazen, without Hamas, is the key to effective Palestinian representation.

Nevertheless, Gaza’s continuing instability and the associated failure to reconcile Hamas and Fatah loom large as obstacles to Obama’s goal of a two-state agreement within two years. Even though Gaza has been overshadowed by Washington’s diplomatic effort to win a settlement freeze, it remains the key focus of the Palestinian conflict with Israel, and the Hamas-Fatah split undermines Abbas’ ability to negotiate effectively on behalf of all Palestinians. As the Obama administration moves from the issue of a freeze to broader talks on final status issues, it would do well to complement this process by promoting policies that address the unsustainable humanitarian and economic crisis in Gaza and encourage Palestinian political reconciliation. ♦

“Those who believe that we will accept the legitimacy and presence of the settlements and that we will accept to bargain on our land and rights will be deluded. With respect to this policy, I would like to note here that the popular resistance our people are carrying out against the settlements, the separation wall, and the demolition and confiscation of houses offers a model of our people’s ability to adopt different forms of resistance capable of penetrating the world’s conscience and winning the support of the peoples of the world.”

Mahmoud Abbas, chairman of the Palestinian Authority, address to the Sixth Fatah General Congress, August 4, 2009

Ungrounded Optimism

If George Mitchell, the special U.S. envoy to the Middle East, is keen on examining the credibility of Israel's latest promises on the evacuation of outposts, he might want to ask the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv to send him an update on the deliberations at the High Court on Migron yesterday. The state announced to the court that it was planning a further extension to the settlers at the outpost east of Ramallah of at least one year. This is a sad reflection on law enforcement in the territories, and the significant chasm between official declarations and the actions of the Netanyahu government.

. . . In parallel to talks about regional peace, [Minister of Defense Ehud] Barak promised the evacuation of the 23 outposts "in weeks or months, not in years." However, at the High Court, the representative of the State Attorney's Office, Aner Hilman, spoke of a significantly different timetable.

Hilman argued that at least one year is necessary to prepare the 50 homes that will be built in [the] nearby [settlement of] Adam, which are meant to house the settlers from Migron. This is part of a compromise deal between the defense establishment and the Yesha [Settlers] Council. The official promised that the settlers who refuse to fulfill the compromise agreement in a year will be removed by force.

Migron was set up in early 2002, at the peak of terrorist attacks in the West Bank, over property that the state acknowledges beyond any doubt as belonging to Palestinian individuals. In October 2006, Peace Now filed a petition with the court demanding the evacuation of Migron, and the state responded that the outpost was indeed illegal and would be removed, but did not say when.

Six months ago, Barak reached a compromise deal with the settlers. However, even if the state meets its new timetable (which will be a precedent when it comes to the outposts), Migron will be evacuated in the summer of 2010, eight and a half years after the land was confiscated from its lawful owners. . . .

Alex Fishman, *Yediot Abaronot*, July 7, 2009

Ministers Support Outposts

Minister Moshe Ya'alon said during a tour of the outposts that the High Court of Justice must be told that the state would work to legalize the outposts. Minister Eli Yishai said that the outposts in Samaria were legal because they received permits from the government and assistance from its ministry.

Ministers Yishai, Daniel Hershkowitz, Yuli Edelstein and Yaalon visited settlement outposts in Samaria. The settler leaders could not remember the last time so large a delegation of ministers had toured the settlement outposts in Judea and Samaria. "There is an unprecedented message in the visit by the four," said Settlers Council director general Pinhas Wallerstein. The high point of the tour was the visit to the

remains of the destroyed settlement Homesh in northern Samaria, which was removed as part of the disengagement plan four years ago.

"When one stands on this spot one keenly understands the meaning of the mountain ridge," said Yaalon. "Disengagement provided jihadist Islam with a tailwind. Only control over the ridge enables real defense of the State of Israel."

Other ministers on the tour spoke in a similar vein. Minister Yuli Edelstein also said that he believed Israel ought to contemplate rebuilding Homesh. In the course of the tour, when the motorcade made its way down from the ruins of Homesh, two firebombs were thrown at the cars. The firebombs missed.

Israel Radio, August 18, 2009

Settler Population in the West Bank Reaches 300,000

There are now more than 300,000 settlers living in West Bank settlements, according to an Israel Defense Forces report covering the first half of 2009. As of June 30, the settler population has reached 304,569, an increase of 2.3 percent since January. These figures do not include settlers living in East Jerusalem and unauthorized outposts. The highest growth rates by percentage were in small settlements such as Itamar, Elon Moreh, and Kfar Tapuah, all of which are located east of the separation barrier.

Most of the numerical growth occurred in the most religious communities. Modi'in Ilit gained 1,879 residents, a 4.5 percent increase. Beitar Ilit gained 1,074 residents, a 3.1 percent jump. Excluding these two communities, the growth rate in the settlements was 1.75 percent.

Among local councils, Har Adar (near Jerusalem) saw 5.7 percent growth, and Alfei Menashe (near the Sharon region, north of Tel Aviv) reported a 2.7 percent increase. Kedumim recorded 2.1 percent; Emanuel, 1.2 percent; and Kiryat Arba, 0.9 percent.

The population growth rate in the larger, middle-class settlements west of the separation barrier was relatively low. Ma'aleh Adumim, home to many young couples, saw a population increase of just 1 percent, as did Efrat, where professionals and American immigrants often seek housing. The population of Hashmonaim, also a destination for many American newcomers, increased by 1.1 percent. Ariel grew by less than 0.1 percent. East of the barrier, Ofra grew by 1.2 percent. Karnei Shomron had a population increase of 0.2 percent—another 15 residents.

The report also noted a 4.4 percent increase—425 people—in settlers living outside municipal areas.

Chaim Levinson, "IDF: More than 300,000 settlers live in West Bank," *Ha'aretz*, July 27, 2009

WEST BANK HOUSING CONSTRUCTION AND SALES UPDATE

Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics reports that construction of new dwellings in West Bank settlements fell by one-third in the first half of 2009, compared to the same period in 2008.

Housing starts dropped 34 percent, to 672 dwelling units, compared to 1,015 for the same period in 2008. In Israel overall, housing starts for the first half of 2009 dropped 12 percent, from 14,790 in 2009 compared to 16,540 in 2008.

In the West Bank, 163 new dwellings were sold between the months of January and July 2009, a decrease from the same period in 2008, in which 279 were sold.

"Israel Building in West Bank Settlements Has Dropped, New Study Finds," *Ha'aretz*, September 3, 2009; "16% Drop in New Apartment Sales in July," Gil Kol, *Yediot Aharonot*, August 27, 2009

SETTLEMENT CONSTRUCTION (Housing Units), 1995–2009

Year	Housing Starts			West Bank & Gaza as % of Israel	Housing Completions			West Bank & Gaza as % of Israel
	Public	Private	Total		Public	Private	Total	
1995	1,870	560	2,430	4.0		1,000	1,550	4.2
1996	1,010	650	1,660	3.2	1,450	600	2,050	4.4
1997	1,020	610	1,630	3.2	1,390	560	1,950	3.1
1998	1,740	2,160	3,900	9.8	1,030	750	1,780	3.5
1999	1,738	1,360	3,098	9.1	2,412	1,524	3,936	10.0
2000	2,567	2,116	4,683	11.2	1,174	2,245	3,419	8.9
2001	781	810	1,591	5.3	951	2,211	3,162	8.8
2002	446	578	1,024	3.4	1,074	974	2,048	5.7
2003	1,285	772	2,057	7.0	1,560	816	2,376	7.4
2004	1,023	898	1,921	7.1	1,182	541	1,723	5.5
2005	899	767	1,666	6.0	868	861	1,729	5.8
2006	573	945	1,518	5.1	1,180	988	2,168	7.5
2007	608	882	1,490	5.1	795	952	1,747	6.3
2008	798	1,320	2,118	7.1	390	1,211	1,601	5.5
2009**	222	450	672	4.8	485	393	878	6.0

* Not including East Jerusalem. Gaza settlements were evacuated in 2005.

** 2009 numbers represent the first two quarters of the year.

Source: *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, "Dwellings, by Initiating Sector, Type of Locality and District," 1996–2009, Israel Central Bureau of Statistics.

Settlement expansion contributes to our people's loss of trust in the peace process. They see that 16 years after Oslo and six years after we accepted the road map, settlements continue expanding and Israel continues to ignore its commitments. This is the context in which one needs to see our opposition to all this business about what is called natural growth and the expansion of construction in Jerusalem. I believe in the two state solution, and a stop to settlement is the key to achieving this objective.

Palestinian Authority prime minister Salam Fayyad, *Ha'aretz*, August 14, 2009

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