

REPORT ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENT IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

A Bimonthly Publication of the Foundation for Middle East Peace

Volume 22 Number 2

March-April 2012

DON'T SHOOT, WE'RE SETTLERS

By *Geoffrey Aronson*

“During the next decade, our goal is for the religious Zionist population to be able to feel comfortable serving in the police forces,” explained Nachi Ayal, a top official in the right-wing National Home Party and leader of an organization working to increase the presence of Israel’s religious and ultra-orthodox communities in the country’s national police forces. “So that those serving will know what it means to send forces in order to evacuate settlers. Who decided that the police belong to only one sector of the nation and not another? I am part of the state and it is incumbent upon me to also be part of the police.

“My goal is that in another ten to twenty years, the police commander in Judea and Samaria will be a religious person, a resident of Judea and Samaria, and in the higher ranks there will be four or five kippot-wearing [religious] commanders representing us.”

For the time being, these new recruits are not being posted in the West Bank, explicitly because of concerns not to force a potential confrontation centering on their religious convictions supporting settlement. This effort is emblematic of increasing numbers of Israelis, drawn primarily from the growing settler community and its allies in the ruling right-wing coalition, who hope to harden today’s political consensus favoring settlement in key Israeli security institutions. Their objective is to increase the numbers of religious settlers and like-minded Israelis in the officer corps

of the police and security forces, and to swell the ranks of religious conscripts prepared to follow the rulings of their rabbis rather than their commanders on issues related to settlement evacuation, and more recently, the presence of women in their ranks.

Likud Succeeds Labor

Four decades ago, Menachem Begin declared his intention to assure the preeminence of the Likud Party, long a perennial parliamentary outcast, by establishing a natural and permanent electoral majority based on settlement throughout the occupied territories. He aimed at repeating the success of Israel’s Labor establishment, which before 1967 rose to political prominence by creating an electoral majority rooted in the country’s rural settlement movements. The goal of today’s two-pronged effort is to broaden the front committed to settlement expansion throughout the West Bank by increasing the representation of national religious officers in the military’s top ranks so that settlers and their interests are treated even more benevolently than is now the case, and to raise the specter of wide-scale refusal by conscripts and lower-ranking officers to implement orders to constrain or evacuate settlements. A recent study revealed that while only 13.7 percent of all soldiers graduated from state religious schools, almost one-third of infantry officers are religious, with the proportion jumping from only 2.5 percent in 1990 to 31.4 percent in 2007.

An effective military force is built

upon discipline. An army without discipline and the willingness to execute commands and to fulfill a mission is an institution in crisis. The Israel Defense Forces and civilian police have, when called upon, obeyed decisions by Israel’s political leadership to evacuate settlers and settlements, beginning with the evacuation of the Sinai and the 2,500 settlers from Yamit in 1982. More recently, however, the effective implementation of two politically controversial decisions—that of the government of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2005 to evacuate 17 Gaza settlements and their population of 7,000 and another by the government of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to demolish a few permanent homes (but not the settlement) at the unauthorized outpost of Amona in 2006—was accompanied by politically potent indications of isolated opposition within the ranks, abetted by political leaders and prominent rabbis, to executing military orders considered to represent a repudiation of the political and religious dictates of Greater Israel.

While a large majority of Israel’s Jewish citizens favors Israel retaining a Jewish majority, many Israelis do not accept the view that Israel’s control of the occupied territories poses a threat to this objective. The West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has been occupied by Israel for almost half a century. It is viewed by many Israeli Jews as an unremarkable part of the fabric of Israel’s communal and national existence. Israel’s security

SETTLERS, *continued on page 6*

TO OUR READERS

As hope for a two-state Israel-Palestine peace fades, advocacy for a “one-state solution” is growing. The ideal of a binational, democratic state in which Jews and Palestinians live in harmony and equality is theoretically attractive. But this is a case of the perfect as the enemy of the good.

Who can imagine that Israelis would agree to abandon their century old struggle for a Jewish state in favor of secular binationalism, especially as the prospect of a Palestinian majority looms large?

Why would Palestinians, whose reality has been for almost fifty years a *de facto* one-state in which Israel forcibly and systematically denies them equality and democracy, believe they would fare better with their powerful neighbor in a *de jure* binational state? In practice, wouldn't formalizing one state without agreement on issues that would have enabled two states only internalize the current struggle over equality, resources, identity, refugees and Jerusalem?

Who can conceive that most of the international community, especially the United States, would do anything but reject a one-state initiative if this notion gained any traction?

Do one state advocates really believe that

since two-state peace diplomacy has thus far failed, the vastly more ambitious project of one state could succeed?

The binational “solution” reflects profound frustration and despair, not clear analysis. It is no surprise that no one has defined a practical process to accomplish it.

Some argue that Zionism is doomed since it embodies territorial expansion and inequality and that Israel's founding goal of a Jewish, democratic state and equality for all its citizens is quaint artifact. But Zionism remains contested and undefined. Other nations have overcome through painful and convulsive struggle deeply unjust and entrenched policies like Israel's post-1967 occupation and settlement of Palestinian lands. And many former mortal enemies have made peace that combines mutual sovereignty and thriving cooperative institutions that enrich coexistence.

But this vision alone is not enough to avert further tragedy. Only an unprecedented combination of wise, determined international—and especially U.S.—diplomacy, and bold new Israeli and Palestinian leadership can turn the tide.

Philip C. Wilcox, Jr.



Israel's High Court invalidated a March 11, 2012 agreement between the government and settlers as inconsistent with the Court-ordered demolition of the illegal settlement. [See *Short Takes*, page 7.]

FOUNDATION FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Merle Thorpe, Jr.

Founder
(1917–1994)

Philip C. Wilcox, Jr.

President

Geoffrey Aronson

Director, Research and Publications, Editor, *Report on Israeli Settlement in the Occupied Territories*

Nitzan Goldberger

Waseem Mardini

Editorial Assistants

James Andrew Lionberger

Zeinab El Tobgui

Interns

IN MEMORIAM

Stephen Hartwell

(1915–2011)

DIRECTORS

Landrum R. Bolling

Calvin H. Cobb, Jr.

Arthur H. Hughes

Richard S.T. Marsh

Richard W. Murphy

Jean C. Newsom

Gail Pressberg

William B. Quandt

Nicholas A. Veliotis

Philip C. Wilcox, Jr.

MAPS 1947–2012

The Foundation for Middle East Peace has prepared a set of maps illustrating the evolution of the conflict from the UN Partition Plan in 1947, and the growth of Israel's occupation and settlements from 1967 to the present. To download visit: fmep.org/resources/publications-1/Map_progression_1947_2012

Copyright © 2012

SETTLEMENT THRIVES AS DIPLOMACY STALLS

“There is no need to look any further,” crows a newspaper advertisement jointly published by Israel’s Land Authority and the Ministry of Housing and Construction. “More land, More apartments, More possibilities.” Permits for 6,000 dwelling units are listed, including 500 in the settlements of Har Homa (East Jerusalem), 180 in Givat Ze’ev, and 351 in Betar Illit.

The threat to Israeli settlement expansion posed by the Barack Obama administration’s initial demand for a settlement freeze has long passed. Recent figures published by Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics show a complete recovery from the limited and short-lived effects of the U.S. policy. The Jewish population in the West Bank soared to 342,414 last year, representing an annual increase of 4.3 percent. Not included in this figure are more than 200,000 Israelis living in East Jerusalem.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has succeeded in setting a diplomatic agenda that deflects effective diplomacy aimed at curbing Israel’s settlement drive and continuing occupation. Months before the Arab Spring and the U.S. election season presented a ready explanation for U.S. inaction, the White House was out of ideas about how to proceed in the aftermath of the settlement freeze fiasco. Today, concern about Iran has pushed everything else from senior-level U.S.-Israeli bilateral discussions.

Netanyahu’s ability to stymie negotiations and continuing Palestinian division have convinced many in Israel and the international community, if not the Palestinians themselves, that there is no point today in trying to resolve the conflict. The Israeli public is overwhelmingly complacent about continuing occupation. In the absence of international leadership, incrementalism dominates. The diplomatic course pursued by the Quartet and the European Union focuses on self-limited, tactical fixes to the occupation—for example, trying to curb Israel’s powers over Palestinian development in Area C, comprising 60 percent of the West Bank. Even if successful, such advances amount only to tinkering with the status quo.

Settlers have their own response to such half-measures. As *Ha’aretz* reports, “Naftali Bennett, the former head of the Yesha Council of settlers, is proposing a temporary diplomatic plan for managing the conflict. Bennett’s idea sounds logical: Since it’s impossible to solve the conflict or annex the West Bank as it is, Israel must unilaterally annex Area C and give the 55,000 Palestinians living there full Israeli citizenship.”

Reuters, quoting a Palestinian source, reported that in

informal discussions earlier this year in Jordan, the Israeli team had suggested that any solution creating a Palestinian state needs to “preserve the social and economic fabric of all communities, Jewish or Palestinian.” In other words, Israel wants settlement interests to be acknowledged and preserved as part of a final status agreement.

“The only negotiations that Netanyahu implemented was the Hebron agreement [of 1996],” explained Palestinian negotiator Nabil Sha’ath. “He didn’t do anything after this. I don’t believe that Netanyahu is ideologically a radical. He is pragmatic. He believes that one day he will need to return to the peace process, but until then he will take as much land as possible in order to establish facts on the ground.”

On March 28, 2012, more than 100 settlers moved into a three-story building in Hebron that they claim to have purchased legally from a Palestinian owner. The area where the building is located has been all but emptied of Palestinian residents, and ownership of building itself is mired in a Palestinian family dispute.

“Four-thousand years after Abraham, our forefather, bought the Tomb of the Patriarchs, we are coming to continue in his path and are building the city of our forefathers,” said Shlomo Levinger, who moved into the building in Hebron along with his wife and seven children. Levinger’s parents were among the founders of the settlement movement in Hebron and Elon Moreh almost five decades ago. Their Passover Seder at the Park Hotel in 1968 marked the

beginning of the Jewish re-settlement of Hebron. Levinger told Walla! News that “the police have received all of the necessary documents, and we have no doubt that once they have examined them, they will authorize our continued presence here. We hope that, just as we did last night, the Israeli government will continue to buy and build houses here in the city of our forefathers and will continue to populate all parts of Hebron and the Land of Israel.”

In a display of uncharacteristic determination, the Netanyahu government peacefully removed the settlers on April 4, 2012

“We are determined to make sure that the rule of law and the authority of the state of Israel over all its citizens will be assured. When there is a violation, it will be put back to track,” Defense Minister Ehud Barak told reporters shortly after the operation, explaining that “the house was taken over by citizens against the law.” ♦

During a quiz show on Channel 2, a contestant was asked which of three towns—Kalansua, Tulkarem or Jenin—was located within [Israel]. The contestant, a nurse with an M.A., hesitated for quite a while and then said she thought the answer was Tulkarem. In order to verify her answer, she requested the assistance of 71 fellow contestants. Seventeen of them—almost one in four—responded [incorrectly] that either Tulkarem or Jenin [both located in the West Bank] was an Israeli town.

Ha’aretz, March 12, 2012

SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

November 22 The Tel Aviv Magistrate's Court enjoins Amidar, the state-owned housing company, to compensate four families in the outpost of Rehelim for failing to inform them that there had been no permit to build their houses. The court also instructs Amidar to obtain permits that will retroactively legalize the houses it sold. (Israel Radio)

November 29 The Israeli government approves the construction of 100 new homes in the settlement of Shilo. The settlement consists of 195 permanent homes and several caravans. (Arutz 7)

Israeli High Court justice Dorit Beinisch rules that all disputed parcels of land in the West Bank that are not registered as state land and therefore available for Israeli settlement, should be considered Arab land by default. (Arutz 7)

November 30 The government of Israel releases the PA tax revenue it had frozen in response to PA efforts to gain UN membership. (Israel Radio)

December 1 Security forces demolish six makeshift structures near Itamar settlement. The outpost had been erected in March after the murders in Itamar of the Fogel family. (Israel Radio)

Settlers in Har Bracha send a letter to their community secretariat to protest the presence of evangelical Christians in their neighborhood. They wrote, "When we came to live in a religious community, we never imagined that one of these days we would be forced to live alongside people of a different religion, which doesn't match our faith and lifestyle." (YNet)

December 5 Police arrest two settlers from Kiryat Arba suspected of carrying out a "price tag" attack on the Binyamin Brigade base on September 6. Police also arrest five settlers suspected of vandalizing army equipment near the Esh Kadosh outpost in October. The seven settlers held in custody are also suspected of uprooting hundreds of Palestinian olive trees. (Walla.co.il, *Israel HaYom*)

December 7 The Israeli Human Rights organization Yesh Din releases a report stating that only 3 percent of complaints lodged by Palestinians against Israeli soldiers before the Judge Advocate General's Office result in criminal charges. Nearly every complaint

filed between the beginning of the second intifada and 2010 was dismissed. Palestinian petitions cite looting, unlawful weapon use, humiliation, and beatings at checkpoints.

The Israel Defense Forces arrest three soldiers for suspicion of carrying out "price tag" attacks, including involvement in the attack on the Binyamin Brigade. The three soldiers are residents of the Esh Kodesh, Adei Ad, and Elon Moreh outposts. (*Israel HaYom*)

Unknown assailants vandalize a mosque in the Palestinian village of Burqin, burning the doorway, scrawling graffiti on the walls, and smashing windows. (Israel Radio)

The government of Israel approves construction of a Ma'ale David, a new 14 home settlement in the heart of the Arab Ras al Amud neighborhood in East Jerusalem. (Ma'an News)

Israeli security forces subdue a protest at the Palestinian village of Nabi Saleh, critically injuring Mustafa Tamimi, 28, who was struck in the head by a tear gas canister. (Ma'an News)

Yediot Yerushalaim reports on the Jerusalem Municipal Planning Committee's approval of the Elad settler organization's construction plans for a hotel in East Jerusalem.

December 10 Citing potential safety hazards, the Jerusalem District police close the Mughrabi Gate bridge in the Old City. The bridge is the only route onto the Temple Mount for tourists and Israeli Jews. (*Israel HaYom*)

December 11 Mustafa Tamimi dies from injuries sustained by Israeli forces on December 7 in Nabi Saleh during protests against Israeli settlement nearby. (*Ma'ariv*)

The Jerusalem Magistrate's Court releases two of the suspects apprehended in connection with the September 6 Binyamin Brigade "price tag" attack. The court however indicts the two for a separate incident involving the damaging of IDF property near Esh Kadosh outpost. (*Yediot Aharonot*)

December 12 Defense Minister Barak approves the construction of 40 housing units in Givat Hadagan, north of Efrat, and a farm at Givat Eitam on the Palestinian side of the separation barrier. The farm is designed to lay claim to territory for a potential expansion of Efrat. (*Ha'aretz*)

More than 200 settlers from Yitzhar descend

on the village of Asira al-Qibliya, near Nablus, smashing car and home windows. The Palestinian American Research Center reports that 53 percent of settler attacks have occurred in the Nablus district. (Ma'an News)

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that incidents of settler violence causing Palestinian injuries and damage to property increased by more than 50 percent in 2011. (Ma'an News)

A new crossing inside the municipal border is opened to the Shuafat refugee camp in Jerusalem. Residents claim that the new crossing will permanently sever their access to Jerusalem, including those holding Jerusalem resident cards. (*Ma'ariv*)

December 13 An international coalition of leading aid agencies and human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Oxfam International, release a statement calling on the Quartet to hold all parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to their obligations under international law. The statement cites increased demolitions of Palestinian homes and property (more than 500 in 2011), continuing expansion of settlement construction (4,000 new housing units), and a sharp increase in incidents of settler violence against Palestinians (a 50 percent increase over 2010).

Around 50 settlers set fire to tires at the entrance of the IDF Ephraim regional brigade headquarters, and several of them infiltrate the base and damage military vehicles. The settlers are protesting what they view as Jordanian interference in Israeli domestic affairs regarding the fate of the Mughrabi Gate Bridge at the Temple Mount. Security forces arrest seventeen of the protesters, including three minors. (Israel Radio)

Some 300 settlers hurl stones at passing Palestinian vehicles on the main road near the Ramat Gilad outpost and assault the commander of the Ephraim brigade, causing damage to his jeep and light wounds to him and his deputy. The settlers fear potential eviction from the outpost. (YNet)

Rabbis Dov Lior, Elyakim Levanon, and Nahum Rabinowitz submit a letter to the IDF calling for a change in the protocol for the use of live fire against Palestinians throwing rocks. The rabbis wrote, "We wish

SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

to allow someone who is in mortal danger to fire at the assailants without fear of being put on trial or having his weapon confiscated.” (Israel Radio)

Speaking at a reunion of National Security College graduates, IDF chief of staff Benny Gantz calls settler violence in the territories, “a dangerous reality.” Prime Minister Netanyahu speaks after Gantz, vowing to deal with violent settlers with a heavy hand: “We will ban the rioters from the territories. . . . We will not allow anyone to raise an arm against IDF soldiers and Israel police officers. These people protect us all, and we will protect them.” Netanyahu also stresses that the rioting settlers do not represent the broader settler community. (YNet)

A group of settlers enter the abandoned settlement of Homesh and throw stones and glass at Palestinian vehicles traveling along the Jenin–Nablus road. (Negotiations Affairs Department–Palestinian Monitoring Group [NAD-PMG])

One person is wounded when Palestinian police in Nablus fire on a group of seven ultra-orthodox Israelis attempting to enter Joseph’s Tomb without prior approval or coordination with the Israeli military. (Ma’an News)

Settlers throw rocks at Palestinian vehicles on the Qalqilya–Nablus road, injuring three passengers. (Israel Radio)

December 14 Vandals set fire to two unused mosques in the West Jerusalem neighborhood of Kiryat Moshe and spray the words “price tag” along with anti-Arab and anti-Muslim graffiti in Hebrew on the outside walls. (Ma’an News, *Ma’ariv*)

A group of Israeli settlers raid the Palestinian village of Duma, setting fire to a vehicle and water tank and leaving the message “a gift from the youth of [Yitzhar] settlement.” (NAD-PMG)

Settlers set fire to several Palestinian vehicles in the villages of Yasouf and Kafil Harres, leaving behind price tag graffiti. (NAD-PMG)

Two Palestinian cars are found torched and covered in racist graffiti in the area of Nablus and Qalqilya. (Israel Radio)

A young Israeli settler is arrested on suspicion of throwing stones at cars at the Tapuah Junction, south of Nablus near the settlement

of Ariel. (Israel Radio)

The Israeli government reopens the Muhrabi Gate Bridge at the Temple Mount. (*Ma’ariv*)

A Jewish National Fund board member, Seth Morrison, resigns over the organization’s involvement in the attempted eviction of the Palestinian Sumarin family from its home in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan. Morrison says the eviction is “not isolated” and prevents a “long-term peace.” (*Ha’aretz*)

Israeli police raid a Jerusalem apartment and arrest six young settlers who had been banned from Yitzhar settlement by court order. The six are suspects in the vandalism of mosques in Jerusalem and other incidents of “price tag” violence. The arrests set off clashes between 150 right-wing activists and police officers in the area. (Israel Radio)

A mosque in the village of Burka is torched overnight. Israeli authorities announce that they are investigating the incident, and in an interview with Army Radio, Defense Minister Ehud Barak says of recent settler violence, “In terms of their conduct, there is no doubt that this is the conduct of terrorists: terrorism, albeit Jewish.” (Army Radio, Ma’an News)

December 15 A few hundred Israeli police officers and civil administration officials demolish two structures at the Mitzpe Yitzhar outpost. The residents of the outpost begin rebuilding the structures later in the day. (Israel Radio)

The IDF announces that it will no longer provide security to the Ramat Gilad outpost following incidents of violence, including the attack on the Ephraim regional brigade base. (*Yediot Aharonot*)

Settlers uproot 15 olive trees in the West Bank village of Burin. (NAD-PMG)

Kol Ha’Ir reports on the construction of a new housing project in the East Jerusalem settlement of Pisgat Ze’ev. The project, “Pisgat Villas” will include 11 homes starting at \$650,000.

December 17 Several settlers attempt to carjack Palestinian vehicles as they wait to pass through the Huwwara checkpoint. (NAD-PMG)

December 18 The Israeli Ministerial Committee for Legislation, the Housing Ministry, and the Israel Lands Authority an-

nounce the approval of 1,000 housing units in the settlements of Betar Illit, Givat Ze’ev, and Har Homa. The measure is presented as part of a plan to put 6,000 new housing units on the market nationally in an effort to lower housing prices in Israel. (*Ma’ariv*)

Palestinians throwing stones damage a settler vehicle near Tekoa, in the Etzion bloc. (Army Radio)

Shaul Goldstein resigns as head of the Etzion Bloc Local Authority following his appointment as head of the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority. (Israel Radio)

December 19 Settlers torch four Palestinian cars in the village of Bitin, near Beit-El settlement. (Army Radio)

Settlers raid the Palestinian village of Bani Na’im and spray racist slogans on the walls of the local mosque. (NAD-PMG)

December 20 An agreement is reached between the YESHA Council, representatives of Ramat Gilad, and the government of Israel to legalize the Ramat Gilad outpost despite a standing order from the High Court of Justice for its demolition. Five buildings will be relocated in exchange for government approval for the construction of permanent structures at the outpost in the future. (*Makor Rishon-Hatzofè*)

Israeli forces demolish a main road serving the Palestinian villages of Beita, Osarin, and Aqraba, in the southern area of the Nablus governorate. The mayor of Huwwara, Moeen Damidi, says that the 4-kilometer road, which had cost \$400,000 to build, was demolished without notice. (Ma’an News)

December 21 A group of Israeli settlers enter the Palestinian village of Burqin and erect tents before withdrawing under the protection of IDF troops. (NAD-PMG)

December 22 Settlers uproot 30 olive trees in the Palestinian village of Khirbeit Shwiekiya. (NAD-PMG)

Andrew Stanley, the EU ambassador to Israel, submits a formal protest to the Israeli Foreign Ministry over the evacuation of Bedouins and the demolition of Palestinian homes in the E-1 area between the Ma’ale Adumim settlement and East Jerusalem. Stanley states that the European Union is concerned that recent actions were part of preparations to expand the settlement. (*Ha’aretz*)

establishment and the young male conscripts serving mandatory, three-year terms of national military service are a critical element of this national consensus.

“Military service in the West Bank,” wrote David Zonshein in *Ha’aretz* on February 1, 2012, “is the central political tool legitimizing for all Israelis, including those in the left, acceptance of the logic of Greater Israel.”

Israel’s security forces mirror the significant if evolutionary changes in Israeli society supporting extensive settlement throughout the occupied territories. Settlers and their supporters can be found throughout Israel’s governing institutions. Both the Labor and Likud parties seek the support of observant Jews. Labor hopes to reestablish a political alliance that collapsed in the 1970s.

“For a long amount of time, the Labor Party made light of religion and tradition, and Labor Party leaders treated this public disrespectfully,” explained MK Avishai Braverman, an ally of Labor leader Shelly Yachimovich. “We should continue in the footsteps of Ben-Gurion, who advocated the path of the Bible, Jewish sources, and the prophets Isaiah and Amos.”

The Likud welcomes not only leaders of the conventional settlement movement, but also boasts a young leader of the “outpost youth,” now under house arrest, and another who heads the settlement outpost of Migron.

The newest member of Israel’s High Court, along with Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, lives in a West Bank settlement—that is, outside the boundaries of the state itself. Not surprising then are the growing numbers of officers drawn from the national religious community and from the settlement sector, which now numbers more than 500,000. There are not only officers who live in settlements, but there are also others who live in the unauthorized “outposts” that the army, when it is not protecting and enabling them, implements *pro forma* orders to evacuate. Recent studies report that settler youth enlist in combat units in larger percentages than their peers, reprising an honored military role once claimed by the kibbutz movement.

A Changing Israel

“There can be no doubt,” wrote Nahum Barnea in *Yediot Aharonot* on December 20, 2011, “the religious-settler sector is taking an increasingly large role in manning top positions in serving the state—in the army, the intelligence branches and the legal establishment. The fact that the coalition and the Likud as a part of it are identified with this sector has contributed to that change, but that isn’t the main reason. There are processes that are far deeper and more significant under way before us. The demographic make-up of Israeli society is changing; the elites are being replaced: settlers and Haredim now have more influence than in the past. There is nothing more natural than that.”

While the influence of religion is an indelible part of the very fabric of Israel’s political life, there are noteworthy

instances of the growing influence of extremist religious views affecting the conduct not only of military operations in the West Bank but also the role of women in the military.

At a recent ceremony marking the end of basic training somewhere in Israel, the keynote speaker quoted biblical verses, reported Avner Shalev, in *Ha’aretz*:

The verses he chose did not come from the prophets’ visions of peace and morality. Nor did he speak about our right to the land in the narrow sense of the term. Instead, he cited maximalist verses from the Book of Joshua: “Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, to you have I given it, as I spoke unto Moses. . . . From the wilderness, and this Lebanon, even unto the great river, the river Euphrates.”

Suddenly, when they speak about one state from the sea to the river, it is no longer clear which river they are talking about. If this is the message being sent by the Israel Defense Forces at this very moment, how can we complain about the hilltop youth?

It’s Zionism

Veteran settlement leader Israel Harel argues, however, that such exhortations are as old as the Zionist movement itself.

David Ben-Gurion—and not [Gush Emmunim leader] Hanan Porat—declared “the supreme aim of the State of Israel is the redemption of Israel [meaning the Jewish people].” He also said that the right to the Land of Israel is “the nation’s right across the generations, a right that cannot be appropriated under any condition.”

The roots of the ideology, which still drives the state, albeit less so, lie in [the Israeli kibbutzim of] Ein Harod and Nahalal, not [the West Bank settlements of] Elon Moreh and Kedumim. Gush Emmunim adopted these roots and tried, with its own additions, to proceed in their light. As we know, its success was only partial. Israel’s governments established settlements in Judea and Samaria due to these roots—not because of Gush Emmunim’s magical power. And it was not in order to realize Gush Emmunim’s religious ideology that the Supreme Court validated the settlement enterprise. It did so because the justices still have Zionist feelings in their hearts.

There are those who fear, and others who hope, that when and if Israel’s political establishment decides to remove settlements, the security forces will either rebel or simply refuse a politically or religiously untenable command. The record, however, suggests that when the state’s leadership makes a decision, however controversial, the army implements it. When it hesitates, it cedes the initiative to others.

It should be of less concern that the army will not follow an order to evacuate settlements than that such an order will never be given by a political establishment wedded to settlement and the marginalization of Palestinian national aspirations. ♦

SHORT TAKES

Right-wing group Matot Arim (<http://www.mattotarim.org>) says the number of events held by ministers and MKs to promote the settlements and the settlers has increased by 50 percent. In a report, the group counts 150 such events, compared with 100 in its previous report, and it covers only the first half of 2011. . . .

[Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu's coalition government is working overtime to expand, strengthen and entrench the settlement project. The project continues to grow and devour huge budgets. Settlers continue to establish facts on the ground.

It's easy to remember Netanyahu and his spokespeople trying to sling mud at Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and his demand for a total freeze on construction in the settlements as a condition for renewing talks. The Matot Arim report clearly proves that Abu Mazen is right. Coalition ministers and MKs are busy trying to placate the settlers, as if the settlers were the only ones who sent them to the legislature, as if no one were living in Tel Aviv, Haifa, Be'er Sheva and Israel's other cities.

In light of the report, Netanyahu's mantra—a call on the Palestinians to begin negotiations without preconditions—sounds like a new height of cynicism and contempt for the people's intelligence. . . .

Most coalition members envision the settlements growing and expanding until it is impossible to achieve a diplomatic arrangement that establishes a Palestinian state. This dream is shared by [MK Ze'ev] Elkin, Netanyahu, and all the other politicians admired in the Matot Arim report, from Education Minister Gideon Sa'ar to Social Affairs Minister Moshe Kahlon. According to the report, you would think that the two ministers, having completed all their tasks, devoted most of their time to nurturing the settlements and the settlers. . . .

Almost nothing is left of [Yitzhak] Rabin's rich legacy. Israel is being led by a gang whose attention and interests are devoted wholly to the settlers.

Ophir Pines-Paz, "The Ravenous Occupation,"
Ha'aretz, March 6, 2012

"Different Israeli governments throughout Israel's history have used the subject of housing to advance objectives that have little to do with housing—not in order to achieve acceptable housing objectives . . . but in order to implement other requirements like determining borders of the state and preserving them," explained David Milgrom a former top official in the Ministry of Finance.

Milgrom noted a number of government decisions of this nature in which communities were established across the Green Line and in the Golan: the Seven Stars plan promoted by Ariel Sharon to establish communities along the [Israeli

side of the] Green Line, the establishment of development towns in the '50s and '60s, the establishment of Karmiel and Upper Nazareth in '60s, the "outlook settlements" in the Galilee in the '70s, and the absence of marketing of land in the country's center in other years. All of this was done, Milgrom claims, as a result of considerations of diffusing the population and Judaizing areas, without a parallel concern for the housing needs of the residents.

Ranit Nahum-Halevy, *TheMarker*, November 28, 2011

A report by the YESHA Council—"Judea and Samaria—It's Ours, It's Logical, and It's Possible"—addresses the Arab question and, believe it or not, it only has good things to say. It begins by noting that there is no occupation, there is only democracy. Fact. The most important right in a democracy—the right to vote—is enjoyed by Arabs in the territories. They vote for the Palestinian Authority. By this logic those who have a right to vote for dog catcher live in a democracy. Second, it seems there is no problem with international law, the continuation of the occupation is also moral and legal. Third, there is no demographic problem. All the demographic forecasts failed and, actually, in past years, the Jews only expanded and the Arab minority only shrunk. . . . The reality only appears inferentially when the report establishes nine conditions for the success of the settlement enterprise including the immigration of another 9 million Jews to Israel.

The settlers are experts at convincing those that are already convinced. But those who are not convinced continue to see the reality that the product of settlement will be the transformation of the Zionist enterprise into a bi-national state. It is impossible to sugarcoat this fact.

Gadi Taub, *Yediot Aharonot*, February 12, 2012

"Reaching the compromise was painstaking. I am responsible for this draft of the compromise. My original thought was that Migron would be evacuated. I wanted it done peacefully. I feel responsible for the Migron error of the previous government. I understand the residents, who were sent there by the government. The pressure on this government was very great. I proposed the compromise, sensing time was short. We said the Court ruling would be enforced unless the residents agreed to the compromise. It is fair and balanced."

Remarks by Minister Benny Begin, who was instrumental in drawing up the government's agreement with Migron settlers, before the High Court on March 22, 2012

REPORTS CITE OCCUPATION AS THE MAJOR CONSTRAINT ON PALESTINIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Palestinian Authority, and the State of Israel submitted reports on Palestinian economic prospects for the March 21, 2012 meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC).^{*} The Committee is a 15-member body dedicated to coordinating development assistance to the Palestinian Authority and monitoring the Palestinian economy.

Following three consecutive years of economic growth, improved security and living standards in the West Bank, the PA experienced a slow-down in 2011 resulting from reduced donor support, the PA's fiscal crisis, and continued Israeli restrictions. The slowdown is expected to continue into 2012; real GDP growth in 2011 for the West Bank and Gaza is projected to have slowed to 9.5 percent overall with 17 percent unemployment in the West Bank and 30 percent in Gaza. Reduced tax revenues, donor aid shortfalls, and reduced investor incentives due to the diplomatic impasse and fears of social unrest, have dimmed Palestine's economic growth outlook.

Israeli restrictions, particularly security control, and jurisdiction over planning and construction in Area C, remain the most significant obstacles to Palestinian private sector growth.

Israeli restrictions on Palestinian movement within the West Bank and the ongoing prohibition of travel between Gaza and the West Bank add considerable cost and delays to the shipping process for Palestinian businesses. West Bank businesses are further limited by an Israeli ban on so called, 'dual use' items such as building material and any materials used in communications infrastructure. Israel maintains a ban on nearly all exports from Gaza and keeps significant restrictions on imports. Exports from the West Bank and Gaza to Israel have declined by a cumulative 24 percent over 2008–11.

The number of Palestinians employed in Israel has grown to 31,414 with an additional 23,000 working in Israeli firms in the West Bank. The government of Israel noted that the PA's economic difficulties raise a question about the Palestinian readiness for statehood.

^{*}Palestinian National Authority. "Equitable Development: Moving Forward Despite the Occupation." March 21, 2012; State of Israel. "Measures Taken by Israel in Support of Developing the Palestinian Economy and Socio-Economic Structure." March 21, 2012; International Monetary Fund. "Recent Experience and Prospects of the Economy of the West Bank and Gaza." March 21, 2012; The World Bank. "Stagnation or Revival? Palestinian Economic Prospects." March 21, 2012

This is one of the most difficult and unusual cases as far as illegal outposts are concerned. The outpost sprawls over vast tracts of land that owned by Palestinians. The debate is over and is not open anymore to examination—a verdict must be upheld. We do not make light of the need to be considerate of the [settlement's] residents, but that cannot continue to come at the expense of the [Palestinian] petitioners and at the expense of a failure to enforce the law. Now the petitioners are entitled to enjoy the fruits of the verdict. The [government's agreement with the settlers postponing the evacuation for three years] is a breach of the dykes—everyone is subordinate to the law, and the moment of truth has arrived. The petitioners are entitled that the ongoing violation of

their rights should be brought to an end. The public interest in enforcement of the law must also be felt, as must the rule of law and respect for the law. . . . Upholding a court ruling is not a matter of choice but a crucial component of the rule of law. As will be remembered, we have expressed the wish that the residents of Migron will 'wake up' and accept willingly their obligation not to portray themselves as outlaws. We repeat this wish today.

Excerpts from Israel's High Court of Justice March 25 rejection of an agreement between the government and the residents of Migron. The Court extended the deadline for the settlement's evacuation from March 31, 2012 to August 1, 2012.

Foundation for Middle East Peace
1761 N Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
Telephone: 202-835-3650
Fax: 202-835-3651
E-mail: info@fmep.org
Internet: <http://www.fmep.org>

FIRST CLASS
US POSTAGE
PAID
MERRIFIELD, VA
PERMIT #2333