

# REPORT ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENT IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

A Bimonthly Publication of the Foundation for Middle East Peace

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## NEWS

The Netanyahu government is trying to head off announcement of an American plan for implementing major elements of the stalled Oslo Accords. The U.S. may call for a three-phase Israeli redeployment in the West Bank over a three-month period, comprising 13.1 percent of the West Bank (in Areas B and C), in return for Palestinian compliance with Oslo commitments.

The Hebron massacre of Palestinians by an Israeli settler four years ago marked a turning point in Israeli-Palestinian relations. See story opposite.

After months of consistent, average increases, construction starts in West Bank settlements appear to have skyrocketed. See story opposite.

A map comparing the Israeli and Palestinian populations in the West Bank, prepared by the Peace Now organization, appears on pages 4-5.

### Also in this issue:

Settlement Time Line	3
Settler-Palestinian Attitudes	8

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## FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF HEBRON MASSACRE AND THE DEMISE OF THE "NEW MIDDLE EAST"

By Geoffrey Aronson

Four years ago, Baruch Goldstein changed forever the complexion of relations between Israelis and Palestinians. The Israeli investigation of the circumstances of his mass murder of Palestinians at Hebron's Ibrahimi Mosque clarified that Goldstein had no accomplices or fellow conspirators. But in the days before he opened fire on Ramadan worshipers, Goldstein did tell friends in the settlement of Kiryat Arba that he was about to perform a dramatic deed that would transform the region.

Goldstein's act of terror was an extreme example of the dangers posed by Israeli settlers to Palestinians living in

the occupied territories. Goldstein, and individuals like him, made it terribly clear that they posed a threat to the everyday lives and safety of Palestinians. And as one of the settlers whose numbers were growing every day, Goldstein also represented a threat to the viability of Palestinian sovereignty, whose promise, at least from an Arab perspective, lay at the heart of the Oslo process, then in its infancy.

In the days immediately after the massacre, the Rabin government had an opportunity to redeem Goldstein's act, and in doing so to strike at the critical obstacle preventing the realization of

ANNIVERSARY, continued on page 6

## EXTRAORDINARY INCREASE IN SETTLEMENT CONSTRUCTION AS DIPLOMACY FALTERS

The second half of 1997 witnessed an explosion in building starts throughout the occupied territories. New construction has been observed at 93 of the 130 settlements in the West Bank, in settlements close to Jerusalem as well as isolated posts in the West Bank heartland—a graphic illustration of the breadth of the effort now under way by the Netanyahu government and settlement groups. Because of their distance from existing facilities, at least 13 of these construction sites could be characterized as new settlements, although they are considered by Israel to be part of existing settlements. Press reports in Israel place the number of new units

under construction at 5,000 during 1997. Other sources have confirmed the approval and initial construction of 4,000 units in West Bank settlements, enough to increase the settler population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by more than 10 percent. Currently, more than 160,000 Israelis live in 45,000 units in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"The number of starts is extraordinary considering how low demand is in Israel and the growth rate in the settlements themselves," one first-hand observer said. "The construction is completely political."

STARTS, continued on page 7

## TO OUR READERS

The war against Iraq conducted by President George Bush in 1991 is widely believed to have created the circumstances for fruitful diplomacy between Israel and the Palestinians. There is a similar, albeit pessimistic, unanimity on the impact of President Clinton's policies toward Iraq. The "window of opportunity" to reconcile Israel and its Arab neighbors, opened in 1991, is now said to be all but closed.

The end of the era, which began when a U.S.-led coalition forced an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, has a particular significance for U.S. policy makers, who have yet to recover from the absence of dynamic movement on the diplomatic front led by Israel.

As President Clinton himself acknowledged, it was much easier for the United States when Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres had stewardship of the process. But they are no longer available. We have to work with the current government.

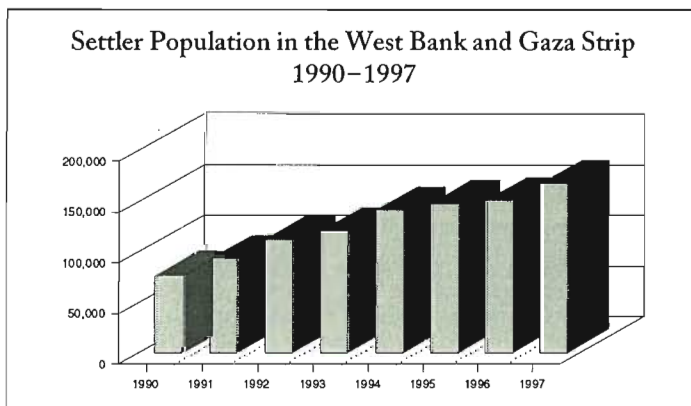
After almost two years in power, the government of Benjamin Netanyahu is

forcing Washington to conclude that only a strong commitment to leadership by the U.S. can maintain the promise of the Oslo process: a measure of Palestinian independence in parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Current diplomacy proceeds under the shadow of a looming "Clinton Plan" to move forward the process of Israel's redeployment in the West Bank. Such a plan, if it appears and is implemented, may restore a semblance of momentum to the tattered Oslo framework. Better yet would be an Israeli-Palestinian understanding, reached by Netanyahu and Yasser Arafat, with Washington remaining in the shadows. But if the two leaders are not up to the task, the Clinton administration cannot wait in the wings. Something must happen soon or the window opened in 1991 will be slammed shut.



### Settler Population Approaches 170,000



According to the population registry of Israel's Interior Ministry, the Israeli settler population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip has increased to 161,157. The figure is based upon ministry calculations as of October 1997.

The Settler Council of Judea and Samaria (YESHA), prompted by the government announcement, claims that there

are 167,000 settlers residing in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, an increase of 12,000 since the beginning of the Netanyahu government in July 1996. The YESHA estimate is consistent with a claim by the Peace Now organization that the settler population increased by 7.5 percent during the first ten months of 1997. ♦

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## SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

1997

**December 5** One hundred thirty units are approved for Gilo, a settlement community in East Jerusalem.

**December 12** *Yerushalim* reports a decision to establish a new West Bank industrial zone on 700 dunams near Jerusalem. According to its promoters, industries locating to the zone will provide work for settlers who are currently employed in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

*Kol Ha'Ir* reports that Minister of Defense Yitzhak Mordechai has approved construction of 800 units in the West Bank settlement of Givat Ze'ev.

**December 15** The custodian of government property in the West Bank issues a tender for leasing for a period of 98 years land in the settlement of Har Adar for the construction of 305 dwelling units.

**December 18** The Knesset Finance Committee approves \$3 million to complete infrastructure work begun in 1990–1992 in smaller settlements.

**December 25** The Israel Land Authority publishes a tender for 100 dwelling units in the Gaza settlement of Nisanit, shortly after publication of a tender for 26 units. When occupied, the units will double the settlement's population to 1,000.

**December 28** Peace Now reports that public building starts in the West Bank increased to 160 units in the third quarter of 1997, double the rate of the first quarter of 1997, and an increase of 23 percent compared to the second quarter. Most construction in the settlements is not undertaken by publicly funded interests.

An Israeli judge rules that settlements employing Palestinian laborers must follow Israeli law and not the local (Jordanian) laws in force in the occupied territories.

**December 29** *Ma'ariv* reports that a special police unit dedicated to destroying houses built without required permits has been established.

1998

**January 1** The Israel Land Authority intends to market lands for housing construction in the following East Jerusalem settlement communities: 200 units in Ramot, 163 units in Shuafat, and 100 units in Gilo. Land for 1,000 units is also planned for distribution at Har Homa.

Settlers are planning to establish a religious seminary as part of an effort to found a new settlement at Jabal Ebal, just east of Nablus.

**January 5** *Ha'aretz* reports that the Israel Defense Forces has decided to impose additional restrictions on Palestinian construction in the Hebron casbah. In addition, Shuhada Street, which, according to the Hebron agreement was to be opened to traffic in May 1997, remains closed by IDF order.

**January 9** *Ma'ariv* reports that the Ministry of Defense has given final approval for construction of 94 new units in the West Bank settlement of Elkana and 570 units in "Olive Hill" in the West Bank settlement of Efrat.

**January 12** At a meeting of Labor Party members of the Knesset, Shimon Peres claims that the government is undertaking large-scale expansion of settlements. He notes that in 30 settlements the government intends to build homes far from existing construction to create facts on the ground. He warns that "in a little while there won't be any land to return [to the Palestinians] and even if we want to solve the problem we won't be able to."

**January 14** In Tel Aviv's Rabin square, 30,000 people, most of them settlers, demonstrate under the slogan—"Netanyahu: No one has the right to surrender the Land of Israel."

**January 18** The Peace Now organization claims that a new settlement has been established in the Talmon bloc of settlements west of Ramallah. Settlement leaders maintain that the construction is for a new neighborhood in the settlement of Talmon.

**January 20** YESHA, using aerial photography, complains to the IDF that the Palestinian Authority has constructed 35 roads in Area C as part of its efforts to expand control over lands in these areas of the West Bank under exclusive Israeli control.

The fundamentalist Ateret Cohanim organization has begun rehabilitating 18 homes in the Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City. It is also continuing its efforts to purchase additional properties "to Judaize the Old City." Sixty Jewish families now live in the Muslim Quarter.

**January 21** Initial infrastructure work begins at the settlement of Kochav Ya'acov near Ramallah for the construction of 800–1,000 units on 200 dunams. Currently, 160

families live in the settlement.

**January 22** Israel receives the last loan backed by the \$10 billion U.S. loan guarantee made available in 1992. The \$1.4 billion loan is the largest ever issued under the guarantee program. Altogether, \$9.2 billion in guaranteed loans were raised. The U.S. exacted \$780 million in "settlement penalties."

Final approval is given for the construction of 132 units at Ras al Amud in Jerusalem. The landowner—in this case, American Irving Moskowitz—is now entitled to apply for a construction permit from the Jerusalem authorities. Five hundred units are also approved for Palestinians in the village.

**January 26** Meir Porush, Israel's deputy minister of housing, reports that there are 1,180 empty houses in West Bank settlements: 1,000 in smaller settlements and 180 in larger urban outposts.

Porush noted that plans to market land for the construction of 5,200 settlement housing units in 1998 may not be met. He notes that more than 60 percent of the program for 1998 is centered on settlements in greater Jerusalem—Ma'ale Adumim, Givat Ze'ev, and Betar.

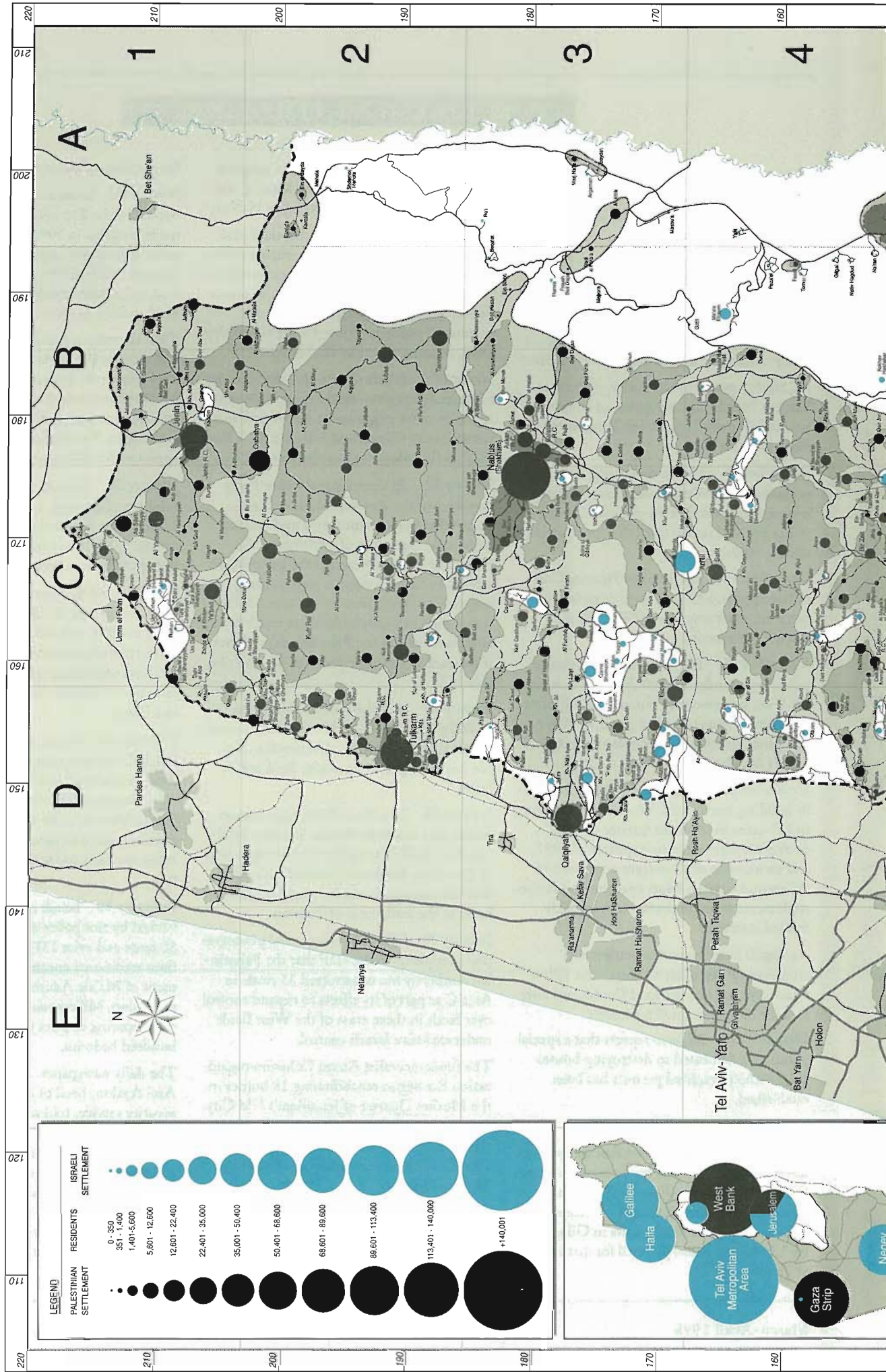
**February 12** Israeli and Palestinian troops face off with weapons after Palestinian soldiers, responding to Palestinian complaints, try to destroy a fence erected by a settler from Neve Dekalim in the Gaza Strip on land Palestinians claim as theirs. Senior commanders arrive on the scene and diffuse the confrontation.

**February 16** Israeli military authorities, backed by riot police and bulldozers, destroy 50 tents and evict 137 Jahalin bedouin from their traditional encampment near the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim to make way for its expansion. Military authorities state that they are preparing to evict the remaining several hundred bedouin.

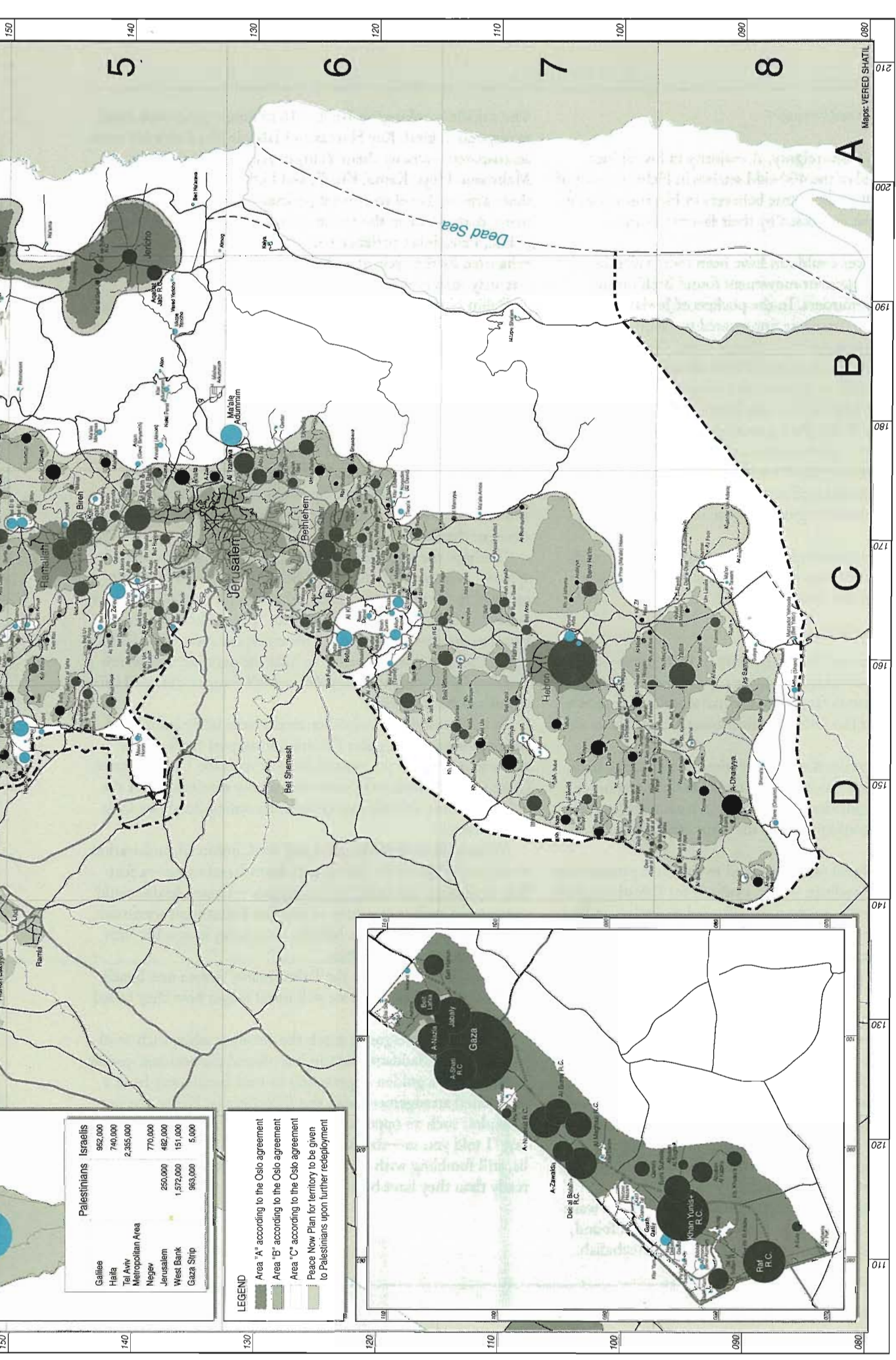
The daily newspaper, *Hatsofeh*, reports that Ami Ayalon, head of Shabak, the internal security service, told settlers, "I apologize for treatment of settlers." Ayalon began his meeting with rabbis and prominent settlement personalities by saying, "I guarantee: no more wiretapping of settlers, no more surveillance, no more agents. I expect you to restrain your people, to prevent violence. I fear that demonstrations will lead to violence that may end in murder." ♦



# Population Map of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and Peace Now Plan for Further Redeployment – 1998







Palestinians		Israelis	
Galilee	982,000	Tel Aviv	740,000
Halla	740,000	Metropolitan Area	2,385,000
Neglev	770,000	Jerusalem	482,000
West Bank	1,572,000	West Bank	151,000
Gaza Strip	983,000	Gaza Strip	5,000

- LEGEND**
- Area 'A' according to the Oslo agreement
  - Area 'B' according to the Oslo agreement
  - Area 'C' according to the Oslo agreement
  - Peace Now Plan for territory to be given to Palestinians upon further redeployment



150 140 130 120 110 100 090

150 140 130 120 110 100 090

5

6

7

8

A

B

C

D

210  
200  
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120  
110  
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090

genuine Palestinian sovereignty. A majority in his cabinet favored the removal of the 400-odd settlers in Hebron, most of them children—all of them true believers in Hebron's destiny as a Jewish city, best expressed by their favorite slogan, "Arabs Out!"

The circumstances could not have been more favorable to evacuation. The settlement movement found itself on the defensive after the murders. In the pockets of Jewish settlement in Hebron, settlers were unprepared to mobilize massive opposition among supporters to their removal. Nor had Israelis yet begun to engage in a tortured debate about the torn allegiance of citizen-soldiers commanded to remove Jews from their homes in the heart of Greater Israel.

Faisal Hussein, Palestine Liberation Organization chairman Yasser Arafat's representative on the West Bank, was one of many Palestinians calling for a revision of the terms of the Oslo accord, which excluded settlements and settlers from the diplomatic agenda until negotiations on a final settlement begin.

"What was acceptable before is not acceptable now," said Hussein. "There is no way of taking peace and the settlers together. It's either the settlers or peace."

#### Rabin Rejects Evacuation

Rabin never wavered in his rejection of this course—choosing, in Hussein's calculus, settlers over peace—for the very reasons that supporters favored it. He had stood steadfast in his determination that the Oslo process protect rather than endanger settlements.

Rabin was determined not to premise his diplomacy with Yasser Arafat on the removal of settlements from territories that Palestinians considered their rightful patrimony, and certainly not as a consequence of the furor created by Goldstein.

Faisal Hussein and others wedded to the Oslo process continued efforts to transform it into a vehicle for Palestinian self-determination, but the protections afforded to settlers and settlements were if anything strengthened by the Oslo I and II accords, which has left Israel in exclusive control of 72 percent of the West Bank (40 percent in Gaza), where settlements are prospering.

The Hamas movement was singularly affected by the Goldstein massacre. Until then, activists in the Islamic Jihad and in the military wing of Hamas had concentrated their actions against Palestinian collaborators. They also sent knife-wielding fanatics into Israel to kill and be killed; they hit Israeli military targets, attacking Israeli troops on patrol, kidnapping and killing border policemen and Israeli internal security forces. For many years they were known for, and they prided themselves on, attacking solely military targets.

Goldstein changed this calculus forever. Only in the wake of the murder was the decision made, and volunteers found, to emulate the suicide bombers from Lebanon's Hezbollah.

The suicide bombings in Israel—16 to date—prompted Israel to respond in kind. Key Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists were assassinated—among them Yehiyah Ayyesh, Hani Abed, Mahmoud Hoja, Kamal Khalil, and Fathi Shikaki. Along with these actions, Israel reinforced policies of collective punishment, particularly in the economic realm. As with the Israeli public, Palestinian patience with the "peace process" has been exhausted by the cycle of violence unleashed with greater intensity than ever by Baruch Goldstein.

Rabin himself fell victim to one of Goldstein's soul mates. The final nail in the coffin of Israel's attraction to the vision of a "new Middle East" was hammered by the defeat of Shimon Peres, Rabin's ineffective heir, at the hands of Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu.

#### Saddam and Netanyahu

Today, in the aftermath of Saddam Hussein's latest march to the brink, Netanyahu, and the popularity of his gloomy vision of a future dominated by Arabs armed with chemical and biological weapons and intent upon Israel's destruction, are stronger than ever.

"Perhaps the government has an interest in a tense atmosphere," explained Member of Knesset Yossi Sarid from the opposition Meretz party, "since, when people are taking antibiotics they aren't taking anti-Biotics. The government never had it as good as it did during this crisis, because under all the nylon sheeting it was possible to hide the genuine and severe problems with which Netanyahu doesn't want to deal and isn't capable of dealing with."

Israeli newspapers and other media have lately been filled with reportage on popular Palestinian support for Saddam Hussein in his now postponed face-off with the United States. Once again, Israelis have witnessed scenes reminiscent of the gulf war, when Palestinians cheered incoming Scuds on their way to Israel.

Warned by both Netanyahu and the Clinton administration to suppress this cry for deliverance from Israel's grip—a feat that diplomacy has failed to accomplish—Yasser Arafat could not contain such expressions of popular Palestinian sentiment, which like so much in the Middle East today is at odds with the original promise of Oslo.

"We will never forgive the Palestinians," wrote one Israeli columnist last week, "and we will never forget how they called for our murder."

Netanyahu emerges so much the stronger when such sentiments prevail. Saddam Hussein has offered the accident-prone Israeli leader a golden opportunity to lead Israel away from a negotiated arrangement with the Palestinians. Never one not to exploit such an opportunity, Netanyahu can be expected to say, "I told you so—the Arabs are the same Arabs." And Israelis, still fumbling with cumbersome gas masks, appear more ready than they have been in years to listen. ♦



Government assistance to settlement expansion is evident on five fronts:

- Inclusion of many settlements in the most preferred category (Priority A) for state-subsidized benefits and incentives (see *Settlement Report*, November 1997). According to an analysis of expenditures made in 1996—that is, before the Netanyahu government could affect economic policies—settlements in the occupied territories led in per capita funding received from the government and budgeted more per capita than any locations in Israel.

- Extension of purchase guarantees to contractors. Purchase guarantees are in place in at least one location, the West Bank settlement of Ma'ale Ephraim.

- Low purchase prices for government-owned housing stock, with some units costing as little as \$30,000. When combined with incentives and subsidies, out-of-pocket costs to prospective buyers are minimized.

- Government assistance to Israelis participating in popular “build your own house” settlement-expansion programs.

- Participation by individual settlement councils and settler-financed organizations like Amana (an arm of the Gush Emunim settlement organization) in the financing and construction of settlement housing—in many cases without the participation or oversight of the national government.

### Creating Facts

In another demonstration of the government's effort to “create facts” in anticipation of further redeployment of the Israel Defense Forces and final-status talks with the Palestinians, one well-informed source reports that government-financed infrastructure work is proceeding at between 80 to 90 of the 120 settlements in the West Bank. In most cases, this work is being undertaken on lands for which there are no currently approved construction plans. More than 9,000 dwelling units—one report put the figure at 20,000—are in some stage of the approval process. A specific endorsement by the minister of defense is required for any project to commence.

Tracking construction expansion in the settlements is more an art than a science. The government rarely makes comprehensive data available, and press reports are usually imprecise and often contradictory. So, for example, it is generally recognized that Minister of Defense Yitzhak Mordechai has approved the additional construction of slightly more than 2,000 units since Benjamin Netanyahu came to power. Notwithstanding this fact, 10,500 units are reported to be in various phases of construction in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This figure includes approximately 4,000 units under way when Netanyahu assumed power in mid-1996 and an additional 6,500 begun during Netanyahu's 18-month tenure, most of which were approved by the Rabin-Peres governments.

Three thousand of the units are located in the larger urban settlements such as Ma'ale Adumim, but the majority—7,500—are being constructed in the scores of smaller West

Bank settlements. This ratio suggests that earlier policies concentrating construction in the larger, more popular settlements closer to Israel have now been replaced by a policy favoring smaller settlements located throughout the West Bank.

### Supply and Demand

The scale of new construction starts suggested by these numbers—4,000–5,000 during 1997 alone—is at odds with most assessments undertaken in the course of the year. The Central Bureau of Statistics reported that construction starts in the first half of 1997 totaled only 580 units. For example, during 1997, the Ministry of Housing and Construction canceled the marketing of five of nine tenders for lands in West Bank settlements because of lack of demand from building contractors. Land made available by state institutions in the four successful tenders will enable the construction of 1,061 units. The canceled tenders had called for the construction of 412 units.

“We have no intention of building ghost towns,” explained Pinchas Wallerstein, head of the regional council of settlements north of Jerusalem. “Now that there is no budgetary support for building, it is all a matter of supply and demand.”

Houses to be constructed in lands tendered during 1997 will not be ready for occupancy before 1999. These tenders, therefore, are indicators of future settlement expansion.

According to *Ha'aretz*, “the lack of demand from contractors is a result of the fact that there are today hundreds of empty units across the Green Line, despite attractive terms.” Construction on virtually all of these still-empty units commenced in the years before Netanyahu's election. In many settlements, units whose sale had been frozen by the Rabin government were sold in 1997, enabling an increase in purchases of 56 percent over 1996.

In 1997, the first full year of the Netanyahu government, land for fewer than 1,400 units is expected to be tendered, compared with 2,440 units in 1996—a drop of almost 40 percent. In 1995, only 744 units were sold. In 1994, however, the Rabin government issued tenders for the construction of 3,970 units in settlements, more than 1996 and 1997 combined.

The successful tenders will enable the expansion of the West Bank settlements of Ma'ale Adumim by 73 units, Ariel, by 111 units, and Betar Ilit, which will grow by 465 units. Ma'ale Adumim, with a population of more than 21,000, is the largest settlement in the West Bank except for those annexed to Jerusalem. Demand for new housing in the settlement consistently outstrips supply. Its vibrant expansion is aimed at linking it with settlement communities in East Jerusalem.

Ministry of Housing and Construction plans for 1998 include tendering land for 1,000 units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Har Homa, as well as 820 units in the “greater Jerusalem” settlement of Givat Ze'ev. These allocations are part of a 1998 program to tender more than an extraordinary 27 percent of the national total of 23,000 units in lands occupied in 1967, a goal that seems to mirror the 1997 construction record. ♦

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## SETTLER ATTITUDES TOWARD PALESTINIANS MARKED BY HOSTILITY AND TENSION

The attitudes of Israel's growing settler population toward Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are an important factor in assessing the impact of settlements on the Palestinian community.

While it is difficult to make sweeping generalizations, settlers as a whole can be said to view the Palestinian community as an obstacle to the realization of Israeli sovereignty over territories that settlers (and many Israelis generally) consider their own. Similarly, settlers view Palestinians as opponents in the contest for the control of the lands and other resources in the occupied territories. Therefore, while there are other aspects of a relationship forged through a century of national struggle and more than 30 years of direct occupation and "living together," the fundamental elements of hostility and national antagonism remain its defining features.

Personal relations between communities are more the exception than the rule. This is particularly the case in larger, more suburban settlements where the majority of settlers live.

"I feel that there isn't even a house there at all. An absolute vacuum," explained one settler from Givon, outside Jerusalem, to the Jerusalem weekly *Kol Ha'Ir*, in reference to the sole Palestinian home standing within the settlement perimeter.

"I have no relationship with them," she continued, "not good or bad, even though they are meters from my house."

The settlers' hostility to the Palestinian home in their midst is emblematic of the relations between the communities at large. According to the secretary of the Givon settlement, the land where the Palestinian home is located "is Jewish land, purchased during the British Mandate. We have a long story with this [Palestinian] family, many complaints and many appeals to the [Israeli] High Court of Justice [which refused to

order the house destroyed], but it seems we have not succeeded in removing the family from the house."

"The settlers took land from me [upon which the settlement is built] and now they want to take my house," observed Sabri Greeb, the Palestinian homeowner. "Without any warning, settlers fenced around 40 dunams of land, and began to build their homes."

The settlers at Givon, like most, are not religious Jews, but middle class and secular, whose choice of residence in the occupied territories was dictated by economic considerations and a desire for "quality of life."

"I didn't come to live here for ideological reasons," explained a settler. "I wanted to build a house close to Jerusalem. This place [Givon] is very beautiful. To build such a house in Jerusalem would cost many times the price here. Before I built here I clarified that the land had been purchased and not taken by force from Palestinians."

While Israelis may complain about the muezzin's call to prayer on loudspeakers, some Palestinians are offended by the lack of settler sensitivity to their cultural norms. Something as benign in Israeli eyes as walking a dog is often viewed far differently by a Palestinian.

"My neighbors must understand," one Palestinian said, "that we are a conservative Arab Muslim family. You know how it is with the Jews, they go around in shorts, while there are women in our houses for whom such things are forbidden."

"What kind of contact can we have with people who built their homes on our land. They have their life and we have our lives—there will be no contact between us," explained a Palestinian who lives near one Jerusalem area settlement. "It does not seem that even our children will have relations with our neighbors," he concluded. ♦

**"The continued building of new settlements is illegal and in direct conflict with the principle of land-for-peace on which the whole peace process is built."**

*British Prime Minister Tony Blair, in an interview with the London-based Arabic newspaper Al-Hayat, quoted in Ha'aretz, January 28, 1998*

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