

REPORT ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENT IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

A Bimonthly Publication of the Foundation for Middle East Peace

Volume 8 Number 3

May-June 1998

NEWS

The failure of the London talks of early May and the subsequent collapse of yet another U.S. effort to bring the parties to the negotiating table has clouded the prospects for the success of the U.S. plans for Israel's first and second further redeployments from the West Bank. (See story opposite.)

A "marked quantitative change" in the expansion of settlements throughout the West Bank has been underway for months, according to a U.S. official. U.S. led diplomacy has failed to impede this policy or even to highlight it. (See stories pages 1 and 8.)

Settlement expansion on the Golan Heights continues at a modest pace and with far less scrutiny than is focused on the other territories occupied by Israel almost 31 years ago. (See story page 3.)

Also in this issue:

Golan Map	3
Settlement Time Line	4
Short Takes	5, 8
West Bank Map	6

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NEGOTIATIONS FOCUS ON EXTENT OF ISRAELI REDEPLOYMENT

The modified framework for the implementation of the Oslo agreement set out in the Hebron accord of January 1997 has yet to be executed. The main territorial features of that agreement—a series of three redeployments of Israeli forces from unspecified areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, due to be completed by mid-1998—are at the heart of the current stalemate. (See map, page 6.)

The West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) is currently divided into three areas of control:

Area A (2 percent of the West Bank) is under the complete security and civil control of the Palestinian Authority (PA).

Area B (26 percent of the West Bank) is under Israeli security control and PA civil control.

Area C (72 percent of the West Bank) is under the complete security and civil control of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

Israel appears prepared to withdraw from up to 10 percent of Area C as part of a second redeployment. On March 6, 1997, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet approved the first of three "further redeployments" agreed to in the Oslo II and Hebron accords—a transfer of 2.1 percent of the West Bank from Area C to Area B and A status, and 7

NEGOTIATIONS, continued on page 6

NETANYAHU LEARNS HOW TO EXPAND SETTLEMENTS QUIETLY

By Geoffrey Aronson

Further details of the large-scale expansion of settlements in the West Bank, beginning in the last half of 1997, illuminate the Netanyahu government's growing appreciation of the advantages of building "quietly."

Preliminary figures for the first 10 months of 1997 show double-digit population increases in settlements in the Nablus region (11.2 percent), the Ramallah region (10.2 percent), and Gaza (10 percent). The Nablus and Gaza increases are occurring mainly in smaller village settlements, while most of the increase in the Ramallah area is

due to the expansion of the new city of Kiryat Sefer (Modi'in Elite) and Givat Ze'ev.

As noted in the March 1998 *Settlement Report*, construction commenced on almost 5,000 new settlement dwellings in the West Bank during 1997. According to Aaron Domb, general secretary of YESHA, the settler council, the increase in settler population "is a positive achievement for the settlement project, and comes in spite of political constraints connected to the construction of apartments in Jewish areas of Judea and Samaria."

EXPANSION, continued on page 7

TO OUR READERS

U.S. policy is responsible, in part, for the current impasse in Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy. It has proven itself unequal to the task it has confronted in the aftermath of Benjamin Netanyahu's election almost two years ago. The Clinton administration has been unwilling to forcefully assert its dominance over the negotiating process, unable even to cajole the parties along a route they themselves have chosen. Perhaps most important, Washington has been unsuccessful in sustaining the spirit of optimism and hope required to open a truly new page in the region.

The credibility of the Clinton administration has been put to the test and has been found wanting. The shortcomings of U.S. policy have encouraged the Netanyahu government to conclude that there is no price to be paid for stalemate and emboldened those charging that the U.S. role as "honest broker" is a sham.

Led for many years by Ambassador Dennis Ross, the seasoned team appointed by both Republican and Democratic administrations has found itself engaging the power and prestige of the government

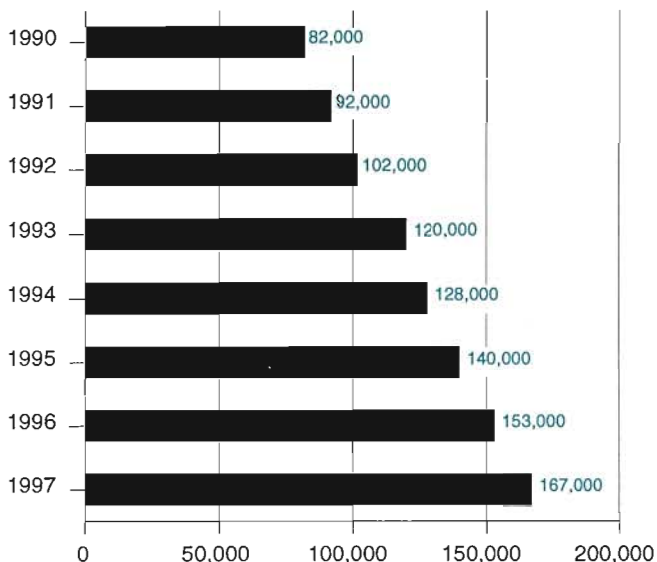
of the United States in a humiliating exercise of micromanaging the smallest details of Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation.

All the while, U.S. envoys—from Madeleine Albright on down—are forced to improvise in the absence of a strategic vision of how American power can best be employed. The London meetings in early May—and the return to proximity talks rather than face-to-face diplomacy—is only the most recent example of the Clinton administration's inability to make effective use of American influence—a failure that has placed the United States in the dangerous position of being led by events instead of shaping them.

New blood is required to resuscitate the American diplomatic presence in the Middle East. But new faces alone won't solve the problem. The Clinton administration has to decide what it wants to accomplish in the region, and then set a determined course to achieve it.



**Israeli Settler Population in the Gaza Strip and West Bank
(excluding East Jerusalem), 1990–1997**



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THE GOLAN HEIGHTS—SETTLEMENT ROUNDUP

With negotiations between Israel and Syria in the deep freeze, news about settlement expansion in the Golan Heights has been conspicuous by its low public profile. Nevertheless, the small community of almost 15,000 Israeli settlers living in 32 Golan settlements continues at a steady pace of development and expansion.

On January 20, 1997, construction began on 600 new units at the settlements of Hamat Ghadar, Ramot, and Gamla.

"In fact," noted *Ma'ariv*, "we are speaking of an 'expansion plan' according to which new settlements will be established in the Golan, under the rubric of 'expanding' existing settlements."

Three new settlements are to be established as part of the first stage of the expansion. The next stage of the expansion—including 900 new settlement units—is under review.

Despite such efforts to increase the Golan settler population, by mid-1997 settlement leaders were complaining that there was an "enormous gap" between settlement plans and their actual implementation.

In June 1997, at the outset of a campaign to expand residential construction and to increase the settler population—christened "Golan 2000"—settlement leaders reported that the settler population on the Golan was to increase by 10,000 by the year 2000 to more than 25,000.

"The Netanyahu government is a partner in this plan," explained settlement leader Yehuda Wolman. "And there is agreement to invest in infrastructure. At the moment, there is a gap between plans and their implementation, [but] not because of policy. I hope that the gap will be reduced."

Wolman reported that 1,600 units had been constructed in the 1989–1996 period, at a rate averaging 225 units annually. He also noted that of the Israelis residing on the Golan, 3,000 are employed by the local government council, and 4,500 are engaged in agriculture. In 1996, agricultural production reached \$240 million, while industrial production reached \$100 million; tourism \$40 million; sales

and services \$50 million; and public services \$20 million. Investment in industrial production amounted to \$16 million in the 1992–96 period.

Expansion today is concentrated at the settlement of Katzrin, with a population of 7,000, making it the largest among the Golan settlements. Three hundred new units were begun in mid-1997, and formal approval from Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai is being awaited to begin construction of an additional 1,000 units. To enable construction of the additional units, the municipal area of Katzrin was expanded by 1,200 dunams bordering a nature reserve.

For the first time since the beginning of Israeli settlement on the Golan, a private-sector contractor, as opposed to government companies, undertook this residential construction project. The 300 cottages being built at Katzrin sell for \$95,000 to \$110,000. The state provides subsidized grants, benefits, and loans comprising 90 percent of this amount.

Since October 1997, 35 building plots have been marketed in the settlement of Katzrin as part of the popular Build Your Own House program. The one-half dunam plots were offered at no cost. Buyers were required to pay \$10,000 toward development costs, one-half the actual investment by the state. By mid-December, more than 100 prospective buyers had signed up for the 35 available lots.

The easing of Israel's internal debate on the future of the Golan after Benjamin Netanyahu's electoral victory in May 1996 enabled the habitation of 300 empty units throughout the region and an increase in demand for additional construction, one settlement leader

explained. Unlike past efforts, new construction is focusing on attracting settlers involved in areas other than agriculture.

In another new development, Israelis, taking advantage of government purchase incentives and relatively inexpensive prices, are purchasing dwellings on the Golan Heights as vacation units. ♦



SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

February 17 Minister of Tourism Moshe Katzav, on a visit to the Golan Heights, promises to finance \$3 million in tourism development for the area.

February 22 An Israeli court halts the relocation of the Jahalin Bedouin from a contested site east of the West Bank settlement of Ma'ale Adumim.

February 24 *Ha'aretz* reports three Israeli settlers and one soldier injured by rocks thrown by Palestinians. Settlers report a "several fold" increase in the number of similar incidents on West Bank roads in recent weeks, connected with rising tensions in the Gulf.

February 26 A tender is published for the construction of 72 units in the settlement of Alfe Menache.

March 1 A religious settlement east of Jerusalem agrees to establish a compound for raising children belonging to the class of "priests" so that they will be able to sanctify the ground on the Temple Mount and thus enable the resumption of Jewish prayer at the holy site.

March 6 *Yerushalim* reports that an electrified fence has been constructed around the settlement of Psagot near al-Bireh. Other nearby settlements were planning to construct similar fences.

March 9 *Ha'aretz* reports the placement of 12 mobile homes on a hill near Eli, a settlement of 1,000 homes. The Ministry of Defense has approved the construction of 2,500 additional units.

March 10 Three Palestinians are killed by Israeli troops at the Tarkumiya checkpoint close to the settlements of Telem and Adura, near the Hebron-area village of Dura. A settler is held for questioning after opening fire on Palestinians near Ramallah after his car was hit with stones.

Ma'ariv reports the head of Israel's domestic intelligence service—Shabak—as saying that in 1997 the number of violent incidents in the Hebron area rose by 200 percent compared with the number of incidents in 1996. The Israeli cabinet approves the continuation of the "Stars" plan for constructing new Israeli towns along the Green Line border between Jerusalem and Beersheva.

March 11 Confrontations between Palestinians and Israeli troops erupt in

various West Bank locations.

March 12 A settler shoots a 17-year-old Palestinian near the village of Dura after his car was stoned by Palestinians blockading a road to nearby settlements. Clashes continue throughout the West Bank. *Hatzofeh* reports "dozens" of Molotov cocktails thrown by Palestinians in Hebron. Israeli students are evacuated from the seminary at Joseph's Tomb in Nablus.

A tender is published for the construction of 65 units in neighborhood B (east) in the settlement of Ariel. Developers will pay \$520,016 for development costs and \$95,000 for the land.

March 13 Four Palestinians are hurt by an explosion near Damascus Gate in Jerusalem. It was unclear whether Israelis or Palestinians were responsible for the explosion.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) prohibits the entry of Jews into areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority, including Jericho and the Jewish seminary at Joseph's Tomb in Nablus.

It is reported that Jerusalem mayor Ehud Olmert has instructed city officials to plan on the assumption that Jerusalem's Arab population will increase to 45 percent in 2020, compared with 31 percent today.

Kol Ha'ir reports that in 1996, 95 percent of new settlers at Givat Ze'ev came from Jerusalem.

It is reported that Palestinians from the Balata refugee camp near Nablus want to construct a new camp near Israeli settlements in order to improve their living conditions and to limit the expansion of settlements.

In response to shots fired at the Jewish enclave in Hebron, settlers enter the Abu Sanina neighborhood and damage property. The Committee for Safety of the Roads—thought to be an offshoot of the illegal Kach movement—takes responsibility for vandalizing a number of Palestinian-owned vehicles.

March 15 The Israeli government announces that 200 families of just-arrived immigrants from Ethiopia will be settled in mobile homes at Airplane Hill, next to Har Homa in annexed East Jerusalem.

West Bank chief of Preventative Security Jibril Rajoub warns that settlers "will not leave there alive" if they enter Palestinian-controlled territory and attack its residents.

The civil administration in the West Bank rejects a formal Palestinian objection to the E-1 development plan. (See March 30.)

March 16 *Ma'ariv* reports that the Jerusalem municipality has uncovered 2,500 cases of illegal construction in the Palestinian neighborhoods of the city.

Members of the National Religious Party meet at Har Homa with approximately 100 people who have registered to purchase apartments in the prospective settlement.

March 17 British foreign secretary Robin Cook visits the site of the Israeli settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim (Har Homa) in annexed East Jerusalem.

The UN General Assembly votes 120 to 3 (Israel, Micronesia, United States) in favor of convening a conference on measures to enforce the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 in the occupied territories.

March 23 Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declares, "By the end of my term, I promise there will be buildings on Har Homa."

March 25 Seven members of the Land of Israel Front in the Knesset write to Prime Minister Netanyahu warning, "If the government agrees to undertake a further redeployment from parts of the Land of Israel, we will no longer be partners in the coalition in support of it, and we will work to topple the government."

March 26 *Yediot Aharanot* publishes a sensationalist article on Palestinian efforts to monitor settlement expansion. "I am sure that if an archive half this size with information on Tel Aviv was located somewhere in Europe, the Mossad would long ago have taken action against it," noted the deputy director of YESHA, the settler council.

March 27 *Kol Ha'ir* reports that Hebron settlers are planning construction of new housing next to Bet Hadasah, where eleven families currently live. Six new units are reported almost complete in the nearby Abraham Avenu complex. Settlement leaders acknowledge that restrictions on their expansion requires them to plan new construction in close proximity to existing dwellings.

March 28 Six Palestinians, among 300 demonstrators, are injured by IDF gunfire while protesting expansion of the settlement of Yitzhar, southwest of Nablus.

SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

March 29 One hundred twenty-two rabbis issue a letter declaring, "The Land of Israel in its entirety belongs to the People of Israel. It is forbidden to give to Gentiles camping in the Land. We cannot lend a hand to the continuation of the wretched [Oslo] process, which must be stopped immediately."

Ha'aretz reports that the Palestinian Authority is planning to construct a village settlement in Area C (controlled by Israel) in the northern area of the Jordan Valley—Tel al-Bira—where the IDF razed homes in 1967. Israeli settlement leaders in the area are opposed to the plan.

March 30 Science Minister Michael Eitan visits the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim where he expresses support for the E-1 plan to create a territorial link between Jerusalem and the settlement. The plan calls for the construction of 5,000 hotel rooms and 1,500 single-family residential units.

March 31 Hundreds of Palestinians protest outside the settlement of Ariel, burning tires and throwing stones in an area over which they claim ownership.

During a planned tour of the E-1 area outside Jerusalem, Prime Minister Netanyahu tells an audience at the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim that "the greater Jerusalem area is of equal value to the city of Jerusalem. Therefore the building here will continue as it does in Jerusalem." The population of the settlement has increased from 18,000 to

23,000 since mid-1996. Netanyahu also notes that he will try to find the resources to begin work on a new road/tunnel linking the settlement with Jerusalem.

April 1 A Palestinian school is closed by the civil administration in the Gush Etzion region. The students there had repeatedly attacked Israeli cars with stones.

April 3 In the wake of the death of Hamas leader Mohieddin Sharif, the *Jerusalem Post* reports that the IDF has instructed Israeli settlers "to act with more caution and tighten their guard in the settlements."

Ma'ariv reports that one of the formulations under discussion concerning a "time out" on settlement expansion notes, "Israel will refrain from unilateral actions in settlements." Israel prefers a more ambiguous formulation relating only to the establishment of new settlements.

Kol Ha'Ir reports that 350 Ethiopian immigrants will be housed in trailers in the settlement of Efrat at a site between Givat HaDekel and Givat HaGefen. Preparation of the site will cost \$200,000. Settlement officials are planning to use the site within two years for the construction of new housing for young couples from the settlement. Ofra and Kaddumim were also slated to house new immigrants from Ethiopia. Plans for the housing of 4,000 new immigrants in settlements had to be scaled back after only three settlements expressed interest in participating.

April 4 Peace Now reports new construction areas at the settlements of Abir Ya'acov and Talmon near Ramallah.

April 6 *Ha'aretz* reports that in the settlement of Ariel, 281 of 356 housing units (80 percent) sold to eligible purchasers under a Ministry of Housing program in 1997 were bought by new immigrants, the highest percentage of any locale in Israel and the occupied territories. In Kiryat Sefer, 59 of 492 purchasers were new immigrants. In East and West Jerusalem, 578 of 2,411 eligible buyers were new immigrants.

April 12 A ceremony is held marking 30 years of Jewish settlement in Hebron. Peace Now demonstrators making their way to Hebron are intercepted by security forces. Arrests and injuries are reported.

April 27 A Labor Party Knesset member of Ethiopian origin visits the settlement of Ofra to convince new Ethiopian arrivals to leave the settlement.

April 28 *Ha'aretz* reports the approval of 807 new housing units at Givat HaZayit, (Olive Hill) in the settlement of Efrat near Bethlehem, a number four times that approved by the Rabin government. Planning continues for new housing at Givat Tamar, where then prime minister Yitzhak Rabin canceled construction in January 1995 after Palestinian protests (see *Settlement Report*, March 1995). ♦

SHORT TAKES

Israeli Settler Population in the Occupied Territories, 1997

West Bank	161,000
Gaza Strip	5,500
Golan Heights	15,000
East Jerusalem	180,000

West Bank Settlements (excluding East Jerusalem), 1997

Land confiscations, (January-May)	30,000 dunams
New housing starts	4,000-5,000
New housing completions	4,000
Number of housing units in various stages of construction	10,500
New dwelling units sold	1,560

"Attacks on Palestinian civilians are a grave matter that we do not intend to accept quietly. From now on, any Israeli settler who thinks he can come into Palestinian National Authority territory and attack a Palestinian resident should know that he will not leave our area alive.

"We have an obligation to protect our people. Do not think that a Palestinian policeman will look on while a settler rampages over our soil and attacks a Palestinian civilian."

Jibril Rajoub, head of Palestinian West Bank Preventative Security at a March 16 press conference after the killing of three Palestinians at an IDF roadblock and unrest in Hebron, *Ha'aretz*, March 17, 1998

percent of the West Bank from Area B to Area A status. The former transfer includes 15 parcels of primarily agricultural land not located near Israeli settlements or claimed by Israel as "state land." If this first redeployment is executed, the Palestinian Authority will exercise full control of 5 percent of the West Bank. The transfer of lands in Area B to Area A would bring 50 additional villages and 200,000 more West Bank Palestinians under complete civil and security control of the PA.

The Clinton administration's proposal for Israeli redeployment is based upon implementation of the stillborn redeployment of March 1997 combined with a "double digit" second redeployment that together total an Israeli redeployment from 13.1 percent of the West Bank.

The U.S. plan under discussion calls for a further redeployment by the IDF from 14.2 percent of West Bank territory in Area B to Area A, 12.1 percent in Area C to B and 1 percent in Area C to A. Implementation of this plan would place 44 percent of the West Bank (Areas A and B) under PA control before the third redeployment.

The PA has developed a series of three maps outlining various redeployment scenarios, beginning with an Israeli redeployment from 15 percent of Area C. It has, however, refused to share them with the United States, despite repeated requests. Of prime concern to the Palestinians is the transfer of lands from Area C status, which will increase the territory over which the PA retains planning control, including road construction and housing. Territorial continuity is also an important Palestinian objective of the current diplomacy.

There is no discussion of a further redeployment in the Gaza Strip, where Israel maintains effective control of 30 percent of the area.

As reported in an article in *Ha'aretz* on April 28, 1998, the implementation of Netanyahu's 9 percent pullback from the territories would isolate West Bank settlements now in Israeli-controlled Area C as "virtual enclaves in jointly controlled Area B. The settlements themselves would remain under exclusive Israeli control and the IDF would retain security authority for all Area B districts." According to the report, "land surrounding settlements in the area between Jenin and Nablus, as well as southwest of Hebron, would change over from total Israeli control to joint Israeli-Palestinian control."

The affected settlements in the northern part of the West Bank include Ganim, Kadim, Sah Nur, Homesh, Yitzhar, and Bracha. The broader U.S. plan would include these areas along with the settlements of Shevi Shomron, Mevo Dotan, and Itamar, also in the north.

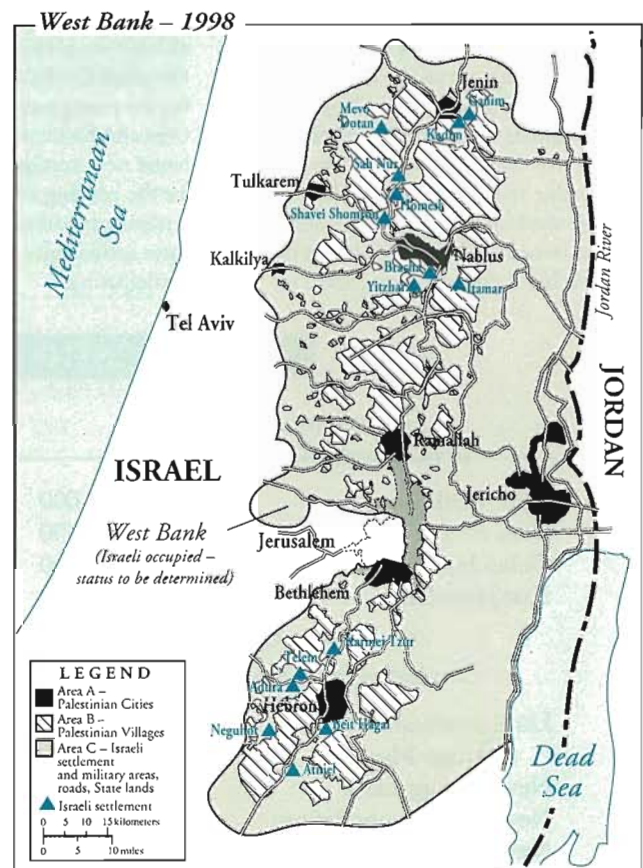
In the Hebron-Halhoul area, the settlements affected by the Netanyahu plan include Beit Hagai, Neguhot, Adura, and Telem. A 13 percent redeployment could also extend to Karmi Tzur and Atniel. The population of all the affected settlements is less than 2,000.

Also, according to the *Ha'aretz* report, Washington "believes that Netanyahu is focusing too narrowly on the heart-

land of the West Bank when there are other options. One option is empty areas in the Judean desert; another is areas under Israeli control just west of the Jordan Valley. According to Israeli sources who participated in meetings with Yitzhak Rabin, the former premier believed that the Jordan Valley could be held without maintaining all of these eastern areas. The IDF Planning Branch map, submitted to the government several months ago, also does not define these areas as part of the Jordan Valley."

Under the Netanyahu plan, according to *Ha'aretz*, Israel would retain a small zone north of Jenin separating it from the Green Line. There would be Palestinian contiguity from Jenin through Nablus to the trans-Samaria highway, which would remain under Israeli control, and then continue to Ramallah. Israel would not retain another road dividing the West Bank from east to west just below Jenin. Instead, it would make do with the zone just north of Jenin.

"In the larger pullback," noted the newspaper, "the zone north of Jenin would disappear and there would be Palestinian contiguity northward extending up to the Green Line and virtually joining [the Israeli Arab town of] Umm al-Fahm. Moreover, there would be contiguity from Tulkarem to Jenin and Nablus. This would involve changing to Area B the buffer zone along the green zone in the northwest area of the West Bank." ♦



The growth of the settler population in the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem, to almost 170,000 in 45,000 units built in 150-odd settlements raises questions about the accuracy of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency's May 1997 report estimating a vacancy rate of 26 percent in West Bank settlements. The 8 percent West Bank settlement vacancy rate estimated by Peace Now later in the year appears to be more realistic. The discrepancy between the evaluations could have resulted from CIA estimates taken just before Israeli families took possession of new homes in the weeks before the beginning of the school year in September.

The surge in settlement expansion in the last part of 1997 came just as the Clinton administration was expressing the need to include some measure of restraint in the Netanyahu government's expansion policies, and at a time when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself was making assurances that "there won't be any substantial expansion of settlements and no substantial confiscation [of land]."

As stated by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in a speech before the National Press Club on August 6, 1997, U.S. diplomatic efforts have focused on the need for a halt in "unhelpful unilateral acts . . . that prejudice issues reserved for final-status negotiations." This formulation was later reconstituted as a "time out" in settlement expansion and most recently explained as an effort to restrict settlement expansion to already built-up areas—approximately 3 percent of the West Bank.

Close to 80 percent of the 4,000 to 5,000 dwelling units on which construction began in 1997 have been sold, according to numbers compiled by the prime minister's office.

This surprising level of demand, in contrast to the slowdown in the Israeli housing market, is attributed to the less expensive housing prices in settlements compared with costs in Israel itself. For example, a detached home of 150 sq.m. in the small settlement of Nokdim, southeast of Bethlehem, sells for \$110,000—the price of a two-room flat in Jerusalem.

The relative value available in settlements is the product of a number of factors: the classification of settlements as Development Area A that entitles them to the highest level of public subsidy, including 50 percent of the land costs; the low profit margins accepted by Amana, the construction arm of the settlement movement Gush Emunim, and by settlement-based contractors; and less stringent building codes than apply in Israel. Construction costs of \$500 to \$600 per square meter result in selling costs of only \$700 per square meter, far less than similar charges in central Israel.

"In contrast to the view that there is a slowdown in the construction sector," one senior official told *Ha'aretz*, "in Judea

and Samaria, there is no slowdown. In the settlement of Allon, for example, 37 apartment units were sold in one night. In Talmon, 40 units were placed on the market and scooped up immediately. Demand simply is exploding."

In August 1996, Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai was invested with the power to approve all settlement construction. Since that time, he has given final approval for fewer than 2,500 new units. How then has construction begun on more than twice as many dwellings?

Many of the units begun during 1997 were approved as long ago as the government of Yitzhak Shamir but were frozen after 1992 by Yitzhak Rabin. The Rabin government itself approved more dwellings than were actually begun during Rabin's tenure. Taking a page from Labor's book, it appears that many of these units are being quietly "unfrozen" by the Netanyahu government after it was decided that construction could commence without Mordechai's formal, public approval. And since most of this construction—up to 70 percent—is occurring in smaller settlements, it has, inexplicably, not been included in government statistics on housing starts in settlements.

Almost 2,000 of the units begun in 1997 are part of the Build Your Own House program. Of these, 1,000 are being built in the settlement of Elkana, 300 in Alfe Menache, 250 in Karnei Shomron, 150 in Kaddumim, 80 in Kiryat Netefim, and 80 in Yakir, according to figures compiled by Amana.

The Build Your Own House program is part of the government's "quiet" construction, according to one Amana official. Its popularity is due to the relative ease of marketing construction plots by the Israel Lands Administration and the preference of

contractors to sell plots for which they hold building rights rather than to take the risk of construction in a weak market.

In response to reports of large-scale settlement expansion, the State Department has energized its intelligence and monitoring efforts. U.S. attempts to receive prompt, accurate information on Israel's construction activity in the occupied activities directly from the Netanyahu government have been stymied by the office of Defense Minister Mordechai. According to well-informed sources, a top Mordechai aide refused a request made by U.S. ambassador Edward Walker for information on settlement housing expansion in the West Bank, noting that the release of such information would only cause problems between Israel and the United States.

"Walker's jaw dropped," commented one source. The U.S. request, in line with commitments made by Prime Minister Netanyahu to President Clinton at their first meeting in June 1996, was not repeated. Indeed, a cable under Walker's signature is said to have been sent to Washington advising that the United States refrain from further efforts to constrain settlement expansion. ♦

When we come to things that we have not agreed upon, I will inform you straight away. We will not surprise you. We will not place caravans on hill tops.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to President Bill Clinton, June 1996

SHORT TAKES

A recent Israeli report on the Palestinian Authority (PA) made the following observations:

- “60,000 Palestinians with Israeli identity documents live in the Jerusalem region outside the city’s municipal borders.”

- “Most of the [Palestinian] construction in the Jerusalem region was constructed illegally.” Building in Area C, under Israeli control, proceeds without authorization from Israel. Building in Area B, under Palestinian civil control (but Israeli security control), proceeds without approval from the PA.

- “In certain areas, the border defining municipal Jerusalem has been blurred, creating a neighborhood/village link between the [Israeli] municipal area and the [West Bank] area just outside it.”

- The PA “relates to the region around Jerusalem, comprising 37 Palestinian villages and communities, as preferred areas for economic development.” PA expenditures for this purpose amounted to \$700,000 in 1996.

- The PA obstructs the sale of Arab property in Jerusalem to Jews. One \$12 million sale for 600 dunams near Jebel Mukaber was stopped by PA intervention.

- The PA has devised a plan for the construction of a city around the village of Biddo, northwest of Jerusalem, and “encourages private building in the Jerusalem region, particularly along existing and planned roads.”

Ha'aretz, February 1, 1998

“The Jewish settlement in Hebron was a mistake from the start, and the price that Israel has had to pay for the failure of its weak-kneed governments to correct this error has not diminished with time. After Baruch Goldstein slaughtered Muslim worshipers in the Cave of Mahpela four years ago, the opportunity arose for the evacuation of the 400 Jewish settlers in Hebron to another community. However, the government could not muster sufficient political courage to make this move.

“In the fragile situation that has developed, each slightly out-of-the-ordinary incident ignites fiery passions, and the Jewish inhabitants of Hebron, who are members of the most radical ideological nucleus of the whole settler population, are ready at any moment to fan the flames.

“Following the killing of three Palestinians by Israeli soldiers [in March] Hebron’s Jewish inhabitants were unwilling to display the level of self-restraint required in this situation and stubbornly insisted on holding their Purim celebrations, which included a procession through the streets of the city. The star of the procession was a young settler dressed as Goldstein. After the residents of the Abu Sanina neighborhood began hurling Molotov cocktails at the houses of the Jewish residents, groups of Hebron settlers carried out personal vendettas against the city’s Arab inhabitants.”

Ha'aretz, March 17, 1998

Sadly we must note that the current impasse results from the policies of the Netanyahu government which prefers continued colonization of the occupied territories to advancement of the peace process. We see a reversal in Jewish-Arab roles concerning peaceful partition, from 1947, when the Jewish leadership accepted partition but the Palestinian leadership rejected it, to the current situation wherein the Palestinian leadership is calling for compromise and the Government of Israel in fact rejects it.

Israel, who has consistently ignored UN resolutions opposing Jewish settlement of occupied lands, can hardly be expected to serve as the protector of the rights of the Palestinians. Only firm action—by the United States, the Europeans, and the United Nations—can lead to a just solution.

*Letter to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright
by seven Israeli peace and human rights organizations, April 8, 1998*

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