
Update: Coalition Agreement Includes Heritage Plan to Judaize the West Bank

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Coalition Agreement Includes "National Emergency Plan" for Antiquities in the West Bank

The Likud and Jewish Power parties agreed to declare a national “emergency” plan to prevent antiquities theft and enhance heritage infrastructure in the West Bank ■ The plan is budgeted at NIS 150 million ■ A Shiloh Policy Forum (related to the Kohelet Policy Forum) document which had recommended such a program, also recommends expanding the Israel Antiquities Authority's remit into the West Bank. ■ The plan also echoes recommendations from a five-year plan for the rehabilitation of heritage infrastructure in the West Bank written by “Guardians of Eternity” ■ Emek Shaveh: Adoption of recommendations by right-wing groups would constitute de facto annexation and rampant Judaization of the West Bank

The coalition agreement between the Likud and Jewish Power parties included a decision to allocate NIS 150 million for a “national emergency plan to prevent antiquities theft and enhance heritage infrastructure in the West Bank”. Unsurprisingly, a document proposing the establishment of such an emergency plan was already written [in 2019 by Guardians of Eternity and Israel's Heritage](#)

[Preservation Center](#)^[1] which included a long list of recommendations that refer to the entire West Bank, including areas A and B. In a Shiloh Policy Forum [position paper](#) from 2021, similar proposals were put forward and, in a bid to present the plan as legally valid, offered a far-reaching interpretation of both international law and the Oslo Accords. Earlier this month, Guardians of Eternity [announced](#) that they had submitted an emergency plan which has the potential to "generate the revolution required for this issue" to the new coalition members including the new Minister of Heritage.

Putting an end to the Oslo Accords

Two weeks ago, the incoming Minister of Heritage Rabbi Amichai Eliyahu from the Jewish Power party echoed the message that Israel should act in areas A and B when responding to news that the Civil Administration had destroyed structures built on an antiquity site in Area B in November. In his statement Eliyahu [said](#): "The historical mistake known as the Oslo Accords, which left many archaeological sites unprotected over the course of two decades, will be stopped on our watch."

If indeed, as the minister proposes, Israel acts to impose its jurisdiction on antiquity sites in areas A and B, where, according to the Oslo Accords Palestinians have control over civil matters including over antiquity sites, this will be tantamount to a unilateral annulment of the Oslo Accords in the field of heritage.

The Israel Antiquities Authority in the West Bank

One of the main recommendations in the Shiloh Policy Forum's document is the transfer of authority over heritage sites in the West Bank to the Israel Antiquities Authority in a way that is modeled on "Israel Police's Judea and Samaria District."² However, unlike the Israel Police's Judea and Samaria District, which operates under the Emergency Regulations (Judea and Samaria), the Israel Antiquities Authority's operations in the West Bank would violate international conventions (to which Israel is a signatory) which view heritage properties in occupied territory the assets of the occupied community and should therefore be governed by the Civil Administration's Staff Office for Archaeology. The Staff Officer effectively replaced the head of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, and his authority is derived from the Jordanian Law of Antiquities, with adjustments via military orders. The transfer of responsibility over antiquities in the West Bank from the Staff Officer for Archaeology to the

Israel Antiquities Authority, which operates under Israeli law, would constitute a grave violation of international conventions and represent a first step toward applying established Israeli law to the West Bank in the field of heritage.

Five-year Plan for Heritage Sites

The Guardians of Eternity's document from 2019 recommends a five-year plan for the restoration, conservation and reconstruction of allegedly damaged heritage sites, including fencing-in, taking temporary possession, and expropriation of the area under the Antiquities Law. The plan lacks further specifications, yet the words fencing-in, possession, and expropriation, leave little room for doubt. It is safe to assume that the same sites slated for expropriation, restoration, and preservation, will be sites that are identified with Jewish history and used to draw thousands of tourists to the West Bank and the settlements. This, in turn, will also result in the intensification of development (following the model of the Elad foundation's "City of David") as a means for physical displacement of Palestinian communities and severing them from their historic ties to the land.

Emek Shaveh's response: Netanyahu's government, with the aid of the Shiloh Forum (and Kohelet), continues to confuse science with messianism, heritage with rightful ownership, and cultural affinity with ethnic supremacy. The destruction of sites, whether genuine or imagined, must not be used as rationale for political action, and political action must not be disguised as heritage conservation. We will make clear that blurring the boundaries between research and protection (of sites) and settlement and annexation, constitutes a gross violation of the prevailing ethics in the field heritage and the stipulations in international law regarding cultural property in occupied territories. Such violations not only endanger the future of heritage sites, but also exposes Israel to professional and political isolation.

^{1]} The Shiloh Policy Forum was probably founded by Kohelet Policy Forum. However, in the last two years they have not provided information to the MOJ. Although they recently claimed they are two separate entities, we recommend viewing them as highly connected. "Guardians of Eternity" is a coalition working for heritage preservation in the West Bank. The organization is not officially registered and has not published any financial, legal and operational information. Their publications link them with two right wing NGOs: "Regavim" and "Israel's Heritage Preservation Center", another organization signed on

several reports regarding heritage in the West Bank.

² [Shiloh Policy Forum's "National Heritage Survey", 2021 \(Hebrew\)](#), p.61

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