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Settlement Monitor

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SETTLEMENT MONITOR

EDITED BY GEOFFREY ARONSON

This section covers items—reprinted articles, statistics, and maps—pertaining to Israeli settlement activities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. Unless otherwise stated, the items in this section have been written by Geoffrey Aronson directly for this section or drawn from material written by him for Report on Israeli Settlement in the Occupied Territories (hereinafter Settlement Report), a Washington-based bimonthly newsletter published by the Foundation for Middle East Peace. JPS is grateful to the Foundation for permission to draw on its material. Major documents relating to settlements appear in the Documents and Source Material section.

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THE FUROR OVER BARAK'S SETTLEMENT "DISMANTLEMENT"

From Settlement Report, November-December 1999.

In 1975, Israeli settlers, with the connivance of Defense Minister Shimon Peres, established a "work camp" several kilometers northeast of Ramallah. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was furious, but he made an uneasy peace with the creation of this fact on the ground. Twenty-five years later, the "camp" at Ofra has long since been transformed into the permanent settlement it was always meant to be. Rabin's heir, Prime Minister Ehud Barak, has declared Ofra to be "now and forever" part of sovereign Israel. The settlement today boasts more than 2,000 residents, including children of the founding generation who are now manning some of the hilltop outposts recently in the news.

The settlement of Ma'ale Adumim began in similar circumstances. Wildcatting trespassers were removed by Israeli soldiers from a windswept hilltop a few kilometers east of Jerusalem on more than one occasion, only to return. Today the once lonely, bedraggled outpost is the most populous settlement in the West Bank outside East Jerusalem. Its 25,000 residents swim in new sports centers, eat at Burger King, and shop in a modern mall. The settlement has a planning area larger than Tel Aviv's, and it stands

as a self-described "barrier" separating the Palestinian-controlled cantons north and south of Jerusalem.

These facts are a useful reference point from which to consider Prime Minister Barak's recent decision concerning the 42 new settlement locations established during Netanyahu's tenure in office. After some back-and-forth haggling with YESHA, the settlers' official representation in the West Bank, 32 of these sites—all resembling Ofra and Ma'ale Adumim in their earliest days, when they constituted a few solitary caravans and a handful of determined occupants—have received the unconditional blessing of the new Israeli government. A few others will be relocated a few hundred meters in one direction or another from their present sites so as to satisfy Israeli lawyers, if not Palestinians, that they are not trespassing. Five of the 42 are uninhabited, and their dismantling will dishearten only those zealots for whom every water tower and generator marks out the sovereign territory of the Land of Israel.

After doing some elementary math, it turns out that Barak has decided to dismantle only one of the inhabited outposts.

Without looking closely into what lies behind the figures and the clear obfuscation concerning what is to be dismantled and what retained, it could appear that Barak is

courageously “taking on” the settlement issue. This impression is only reinforced by the furor unleashed within the settlement right wing. For this group, including the balding “pioneers” of an earlier era, the settler establishment’s approval of the evacuation of any outpost, no matter how threadbare or empty, is a dangerous precedent as Barak confronts Palestinian demands for independence.

The settlers’ official representatives, for their part, are downplaying in their dealings with their compatriots their first-ever collaboration in a government decision to remove even one settlement by noting that their rights to the “disputed” lands have been recognized and that all in all Barak’s offer is a small price for securing the future of those that will remain. Meanwhile, the Americans will no doubt be impressed by Barak’s resolve and will forget earlier admonitions by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to Netanyahu to dismantle *all* these outposts.

But those familiar with the history of places like Ofra and Ma’ale Adumim can be forgiven for being skeptical that even Barak’s extremely limited intentions will be realized. There are growing signs that the more ideological of the settlers are mobilizing to defeat the dismantlement even of this one inhabited outpost with its few makeshift dwellings. Israeli governments in the past have decided to dismantle similar outposts, only to shrink from the consequences of their decision. It will be remembered that Hebron, whose settlement by Jews in 1979 was championed by David Levy, then housing minister and now foreign minister, was condemned by none other than Prime Minister Menachem Begin himself. Begin is long gone and his cabinet’s decision declaring the settlement illegal is (like the initial status of Ma’ale Adumim and countless other outposts) forgotten by all but a few old-timers. One should therefore wait some months before declaring Barak “victorious” in his pathetic strike against those whose most heartfelt desire is to prevent the creation of a truly sovereign Palestinian state.

SETTLEMENT CHRONOLOGY

From Settlement Report, November–December 1999.

25 August

The Palestinian Center for Human Rights reports that settlers from Netzarim in the Gaza Strip have run a 450-meter water pipe from their settlement to a piece of land (esti-

mated at 500 dunams) located to the south of the settlement, thereby paving the way to expand the borders of Netzarim to the south. The move is the latest in a series of Netzarim expansions since the signing of the Oslo accords, including the annexation of 300 dunams of land to the west of the settlement, 150 dunams to the north, and 250 dunams to the south. The military post situated on the western side of Netzarim has also been expanded, and construction activities were recently witnessed in the settlement, including the erection of a synagogue and 35 additional houses, all of which are still empty. The future port of Gaza will be built on the beachfront south of Gaza City, only three kilometers away from Netzarim.

Agence France-Presse reports that “Israeli settlers demonstrated in the West Bank settlement of Rehan on 23 August to protest the Israeli army’s plan to set up a base in woodland near Jinin.” The proposed base will cover 60 dunams (40 percent of the woods’ total area), and 750 trees have already been felled in preparation for construction. The settlers claim that the army’s actions are “a violation of their ‘natural environment’ and [have] taken the case to the Israeli Supreme Court.” Work on the site has been suspended since the demonstration.

Palestine Report notes that the Palestinian District Planning Office in Bethlehem “is in possession of a new Israeli map that details the construction of an expanded checkpoint at the entrance to Bethlehem—one similar to Gaza’s Erez crossing.”

26 August

Burger King announces that “it has canceled the right of its Israeli franchisee, Rikamor Ltd., to operate its Burger King food court counter in the town of Ma’ale Adumim, northeast of Jerusalem.” The company’s press release cites “a breach of its franchise contract and misrepresentation. Rikamor falsely informed Burger King that the food court would be located in Israel.” The restaurant, however, continues to operate under the Burger King logo.

2 September

IsraelWire reports that “Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein has informed Minister of Industry and Trade Ran Cohen of the Meretz Party that he does not have the authority to change the government classifications of areas throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip.” Cohen had wanted to reduce state

subsidies and benefits available in many settlements.

Ha'Aretz reports that the Israeli Supreme Court has "ruled in favor of the al-Abasi family in its lengthy legal dispute with the Ir David (City of David) settler association over the family's residence in the East Jerusalem village of Silwan." The court upheld an earlier ruling that "the property belongs jointly to family members and to the Custodian of Absentee Properties and . . . any rights the association may have been given should be annulled." Ir David has been ordered to pay the family \$5,000, and the state must pay a similar sum.

7 September

Ha'Aretz reports that the Israeli government intends to cut the budget of the World Zionist Organization's (WZO) settlement department from \$47 million this year to \$25 million next year. Avraham Duvdevani, chair of the WZO settlement department, claims that "the drastic budget cut will virtually wipe out the settlement section" and lead to the demise of settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, particularly those affected by implementation of the Wye accords.

10 September

IsraelWire reports that "the delay in Yasir Arafat signing the official maps has postponed the 7 percent Israeli withdrawal" from West Bank lands from 9 to 10 September.

13 September

Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazin), Arafat's top deputy, says that "the resumption of the permanent status negotiations requires a full cessation of all Israeli settlement activities," including "expanding existing ones."

Prime Minister Barak convenes the Ministerial Committee on Jerusalem and vows to consolidate sovereignty over Jerusalem "especially in this year of intensive discussions on the permanent status agreement."

Faisal Hussein, the PA official in charge of Jerusalem affairs, says there is no future for Ma'ale Adumim residents but evacuation. "Creating a mixture of Israeli settlements with Palestinian cities is nothing but a ticking time bomb that will only lead to situations like those in Kosovo."

14 September

Peace Now announces that "a tender for 12 living units [was] issued in Kiryat Arba" on 13 September, bringing to 2,604 the total number of tenders issued for living units in

the settlements since the Barak government assumed power.

At a cabinet meeting, Barak sets out Israel's positions at the final status talks: No return to the 1967 borders; a united Jerusalem as Israel's eternal capital; no foreign army west of the Jordan River; most Israeli settlement blocs will remain under Israeli sovereignty.

At the West Bank settlement of Ma'ale Adumim, Barak states that the settlement will remain "part of the State of Israel and part of Greater Jerusalem forever. . . . We, the new government, will continue to strengthen the State of Israel and its hold on the Land of Israel, and we will continue to strengthen Ma'ale Adumim. . . . Every tree you plant, every house you build is part of the State of Israel forever. Period. We are not going to move settlements of 25,000 people whom the Rabin government and all governments nurtured. You are part of Greater Jerusalem! . . . You will be part of the State of Israel in every permanent arrangement."

16 September

Yedi'ot Aharonot reports that, according to a study recently conducted by the Israeli security establishment, at least 10 out of the 42 hilltop settlements established over the course of last year in the West Bank "are overtly illegal." A security official who took part in the investigation affirmed that "most of the strongholds had been established illegally, but a great many of them were in the midst of being 'laundered' after the fact by means of permits given only after the strongholds were already established." The study concluded that ten of the settlements "are not included in any master plan, and one of them was built inside an IDF firing zone."

19 September

Yedi'ot Aharonot reports that sportswear concern Kappa, in which the Italian multinational Benetton is a minority shareholder, will establish a production system for its sportswear at the West Bank settlement of Barkan.

Al-Quds reports that, at a conference of Palestinian experts organized by the Miftah Institute, PA Local Government M Saeb Erakat referred to "a study that had disclosed that all the Israeli military camps and the settlements put together make up 125 square kilometers of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip."

20 September

Bnei Yehuda, a settlement of 240 families in the southern Golan, lays the cornerstone of a new 52-home housing project—the first phase of a 1,500-unit program. Housing Minister Rabbi Yitzhak Levy officially dedicates the new neighborhood. Levy also dedicates 24 housing units at the Golan settlement of Kanaf. Golan residents end the day by joining several government ministers and MKs at an evening gathering, held under the motto “Together we will preserve the Golan.”

22 September

The State Attorney's Office files an appeal with the High Court to overturn the acquittal of the security coordinator of the Hadar Beitar settlement, who was charged with killing an 11-year-old Palestinian boy three years ago in the village of Hussan, near Bethlehem.

23 September

Israel announces the approval of 14 military orders to seal off large areas of agricultural land belonging to some 79 Palestinian villages in the West Bank. The total land area affected is greater than the 7 percent of West Bank territory transferred to PA control on 13 September. The orders were reportedly signed on 5 May 1999, the end of Oslo's transitional period, but only now made public.

26 September

The Palestinian Center for Human Rights reports a 16 September action in which “a group of settlers accompanied by Israeli bulldozers leveled 20 dunums of land located alongside al-Malalha community in the east of Rafah Mawasi in the Gaza Strip.” The organization also reports that Israel has “seized land in the Gaza Strip to build a new Jewish-only road linking the settlements of Gan Or, Gadid, and Bedolah.”

Peace Now reports that the Housing Ministry has issued tenders for the construction of 2,594 new residential units in the West Bank since the installation of the government of Ehud Barak. According to Peace Now, “these tenders are primarily for new homes in urban settlements: 1,089 apartments in the city of Beitar, 594 in Givat Ze'ev, 461 in Ma'ale Adumim, as well as in Har Adar, Karnei Shomron, Kiryat Arba, and Otniel.”

Housing Minister Levy says that “the tenders for the construction of 2,600 apartments issued by his ministry in [the West Bank] do not stand in opposition to the government guidelines.” He explains that “the housing

units in question are necessary for natural growth” and “are mainly in areas not far from Jerusalem such as Ma'ale Adumim and Beitar.”

Rabbi Levy and Likud leader Ariel Sharon are guests at a ceremony at the Hebron area settlement of Otniel. Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel also attends.

27 September

The Israeli Housing Ministry reports that the Barak government has authorized construction of 2,600 new housing units in West Bank Jewish settlements in its first three months in office, mostly in settlements near Jerusalem. Under former prime minister Netanyahu's tenure, the ministry approved an average of 3,000 new units a year.

30 September

Settlers in Gush Etzion learn that the Civil Administration has approved 14 Palestinian farms in the region. Thirteen of these, comprising 2,998 dunams, are in area C. Deputy Minister Sneh has promised that “the works [will] be stopped for two weeks in order to carefully check who owns the lands.” According to Arutz-7 radio, “a certain amount of territory is in the early stages of being declared state land, but even the farms on private Arab-owned lands are only allowed to be run privately and not by the PA, as is the case. The PA has signs on the properties, attesting to the fact that it is behind the works.”

An Israeli police report concludes that “construction of a settlement at Ma'ale HaZeitim (Ras al-Amud) does not present a security risk.”

9 October

Israeli settlers attack a Jordanian parliamentary delegation visiting al-Ibrahimi Mosque, in the PA-controlled sector of Hebron. Parliamentarians say that a detachment of IDF soldiers nearby observed the incident but did not intervene to protect them. Jordan officially protests to Israel. The delegation is on a four-day visit to the occupied territories.

10 October

Israeli cabinet authorizes Prime Minister Barak to close the 42 Jewish settlements established since the October 1998 Wye agreement.

11 October

A day after his cabinet gives him permission to remove the 42 settlements constructed since Wye, PM Barak approves the Housing Ministry's 27 September decision to

construct 2,600 new housing units in West Bank settlements.

12 October

PM Barak orders 15 of the 42 unauthorized settlements constructed after the Wye accord to be dismantled; he says 11 others will be kept, the other 16 may remain for now, but new building is forbidden.

13 October

After a day of talks with settlement leaders who threaten to stage a showdown over his plans to evacuate 15 illegal settlements, PM Barak agrees not to evacuate residents from three of the 15 encampments, to preserve a school at a fourth, and to allow livestock to remain at a fifth. Settlers agree to voluntarily evacuate the remaining ten enclaves, moving their mobile homes to nearby settlements, in many cases just a few hundred meters away.

Israeli FM David Levy sends a letter to the Jordanian foreign minister saying that the settler assault on Jordanian deputies on 9 October could have been avoided if Jordan had coordinated the trip with Israel.

14 October

Israeli Knesset speaker Avraham Burg sends a letter to his Jordanian counterpart, 'Abd al-Hadi Majali, apologizing for the incident the preceding week in Hebron, where Jordanian lawmakers were harassed by settlers.

16 October

PA denounces Barak's decision to allow most of the 42 illegal settlements established after the Wye signing to remain.

17 October

Thousands of Jewish settlers, angered by Barak's plans to dismantle settlement enclaves, protest outside his home.

19 October

Members of the YESHA settlers' council attempt to haul away the lone shipping container marking Shvut Rachel (also known as Hill 804), one of the 12 enclaves constructed after Wye that the council and Barak agreed to remove or partially dismantle, but they are blocked by a small group of ultranationalist settlers. The IDF is present, but does not interfere. Settler leaders back down, leaving the enclave in place, but manage to clear another uninhabited enclave nearby.

20 October

Hundreds of ultra-Orthodox settlers set up a makeshift synagogue at one of the illegal enclaves ordered dismantled by Barak.

22 October

YESHA members dismantle the last of the five uninhabited settlements in the West Bank. They had tried to clear it earlier, but were blocked by protesting yeshiva students.

30 October

Near Tarqumiyya, half a mile from the new safe-passage route in an Israeli-controlled section of the West Bank, unidentified assailants open fire on a bus, injuring five Israelis from the Kiryat Arba settlement.

31 October

Israel opens Shuhada Street, which runs along the border of a Jewish settlement in Hebron, to Palestinian taxis. It will gradually be opened to all Palestinian traffic.

1 November

Israel blames the PA for the failure to reopen the wholesale market in Hebron by today, the deadline cited in Wye II. Israel says that the PA has reneged on a deal to build a wall separating the market, which is in the Israeli-controlled section of the city, from an abutting Jewish settlement enclave, so as to ensure the security of the settlers.

Two of four Jewish settler families are evacuated from Mitzpe Hagit, one of the settlements ordered removed by Barak.

4 November

PM Barak gives settlers until 5 November to voluntarily dismantle all ten settlements that he ordered removed on 13 October or face ejection by the IDF.

6 November

PM Barak extends until 9 November the deadline for settlers to voluntarily evacuate the remaining "illegal" enclaves. At least one outpost remains occupied.

9 November

The Israeli government announces that IDF soldiers will forcibly evacuate the last occupied outpost, Havat Maon, of the ten ordered removed by PM Barak. Over the preceding few days, some 300 ultranationalist settlers had joined the four families originally encamped at the site and set up prefabricated houses in protest, hoping to make it impossible for the government to remove the settlement. A group of settler rabbis issues a ruling forbidding the use of force against soldiers, but also calling the eviction

a "crime against the Torah and the homeland." Barak cuts a trip to Paris short to return home to deal with the evacuation.

10 November

Before dawn, the IDF moves into Havat Maon and forcibly removes settlers and protesters.

THE GOLAN SETTLEMENT FRONT

SETTLERS MOBILIZE TO PREVENT AN ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL

From Settlement Report, November–December 1999

The election of Ehud Barak has given renewed attention to the question of an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights as part of a peace agreement with Syria.

The 17,000 Israeli residents of the 33 Golan settlements established throughout the 454 mi² plateau (roughly 37 miles by 12.5 miles) will necessarily be affected by an agreement. Indeed, even the public diplomacy being conducted around a possible resumption of the long-recessed official talks has forced settlers, as well as the Israeli public at large, to consider the implications of a peace treaty with Syria.

Among the territories still occupied by Israel, the Golan occupies a particular place in the popular Israeli imagination. It was in the Golan that the first outpost in the territories conquered in June 1967, Merom Golan, was established by activists from the ranks of Israel's secular Zionists. While the messianic romantics of Gush Emunim focused their intentions on the West Bank, the Golan settlers have traditionally been drawn from the Labor-left side of the divide in Israeli society. For them, and for those in government who sent them, their efforts, while certainly part of the fulfillment of the Zionist imperative to "settle the land," were nonetheless predicated more on considerations of security and strategy than divine right. The sense that the settlement enterprise on the Golan was an instrument—a card to be played in eventual negotiations with Damascus—was articulated more clearly than in any other settlement domain.

In contrast to Jewish settlement elsewhere in the occupied territories, where the policy of "creating facts" has become an end in itself, settlement in the Golan has proceeded at a far more measured pace under direct government sponsorship. The Golan's settler population is now 17,000, representing an increase of 18 percent since 1994, compared

to the settler population of the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem, that has almost doubled during the same period. This lackluster pace is in no small part due to a lack of competition for the land: except for the inhabitants (mostly Druze) of a few villages near the cease-fire lines at the northern tip of the region, who today number 17,000, the Golan was almost entirely emptied of its population during the 1967 war.

The settlers who came to the Golan are therefore viewed in the Israeli popular imagination less as "cowboys" waging land wars (as in the West Bank) than as patriotic Israelis doing their part to assure Israeli security while seeking the good life. As Israel Harel, a prominent West Bank settler leader, observed with some envy, Golan settlers "went with the goodwill of all Israelis."

The Golan has also become a popular Israeli tourist destination. There is hardly a Jewish citizen who has not visited the remnants of the ancient Jewish fortress at Gamla, where battle was waged against the Romans. From the ski slopes at Jabal al-Shaykh [Mount Hermon] to the hot springs and ruins at al-Hammah Israelis take pleasure in visiting the area, loved for its terrain and ecology, its open spaces and wonderful scenery. This popularity distinguishes the Golan from the West Bank and even from Jerusalem's Old City, which, especially since the intifada, have become terra incognita for the vast majority of Israelis.

The perception of the Golan as an environmental paradise is encouraged by builders seeking buyers for new homes along the plateau. The 200 cottages being constructed in the settlements of Bene Yehuda, Gamla, Had Nes, and Qidmat Tzvi were described by their builder earlier this year as "real estate with a quality of life like Switzerland." For Israelis this association rings true.

The Golan's secure place in Israel's popular culture, and the particular nature of settlement expansion in the Golan, have long served as the foundation of efforts to prevent an Israeli withdrawal and the dismantling of settlements in the event of an agreement with Syria. These campaigns have depended far less than in the West Bank upon establishing "facts on the ground" than in mobilizing opinion to create a political critical mass opposed to withdrawal. This strategy of popular political mobilization, spearheaded by politically well-connected Golan settlers drawing upon their roots in Israel's Labor party establishment, has kept the future of

the Golan on the short list of items on Israel's domestic political agenda.

On 14 December 1981, the Israeli Knesset passed the Golan Law annexing the area to Israel. In 1992, when Yitzhak Rabin's election as prime minister raised the prospect of an agreement with Syria and a cancellation of the Golan Law, Golan settlers sponsored a nationwide campaign under the slogan "The People Are with the Golan." Rabin later committed himself to holding a national referendum on any agreement reached with Syria. But he opposed efforts to require a large majority in the Knesset to repeal the Golan Law championed by the parliamentary faction most closely associated with the Golan settlers, the Third Way party.

"Israeli history did not begin on the basalt rocks of the Golan. We did not conquer the Golan in order to annex it. We have all known that the Golan Heights was destined to become a strategic asset in the pursuit of peace," explained Labor Minister Moshe Shahal at the time.

Nevertheless, on 26 January 1999, during the last months of the government of Benjamin Netanyahu, the Knesset approved legislation requiring that any withdrawal from "sovereign Israeli territory" win the approval of 61 members of the Knesset. If the current Knesset approves, the law will also require a public referendum to ratify any withdrawal.

Netanyahu's commitment not to leave the Golan was called into question when he described the area in a 21 March 1999 letter to settlers only as a "strategic and security asset to the state of Israel." This statement did little to allay the doubts about his intentions, doubts sparked by the publication earlier this year of details of Operation Mango—a surreptitious government effort, begun by Rabin and continued under Netanyahu, to quantify Israel's civilian investments in the Golan [see Settlement Report in *JPS* 111].

According to *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, the survey of civilian assets conducted at 29 out of 33 settlements (but not including the largest settlement of Qatzrin, with a population of 7,500) identified \$2.5 billion in civilian assets.

Ehud Barak's election has only increased settler concerns. He was chief of staff under Rabin and Peres, and negotiated directly with his Syrian counterpart, Hikmat Shihabi. His adaptation of Rabin's formula, declaring that "the depth of withdrawal will match the extent of peace and the quality of security arrangements," is understood by Israelis to imply a readiness to evacuate all settlements.

Barak's promise to withdraw from south Lebanon within one year has also raised the profile of the interdependence between the unpopular and bloody occupation in south Lebanon and that of the Golan, to the settlers' dismay.

"The price of holding [the Golan settlement of Qatzrin]," noted an unidentified member of Netanyahu's cabinet in February, "is probably thirty to forty dead [Israeli] soldiers a year in Lebanon." Barak's promise to leave Lebanon by next summer suggests that he is not prepared to pay such a price. Should the Israeli public embrace this reasoning, the settlers' task will become that much more difficult.

Settlers are now organizing for what they view as their most important challenge—not capturing hilltops, but preparing to win the battle for the hearts and minds of the public. In July, 100 activists belonging to the Golan Settlers' Council adopted a new slogan, "I Am with the Golan." This will be the centerpiece of what they promise will be a renewed popular effort to force the Barak government to rethink its willingness to enter into talks with Syria on the basis of withdrawal and evacuation. Failing that, the aim is to convince a public increasingly at peace with the concept of withdrawal from the area to vote "no" in the eventual referendum. There is also an increasing readiness to cooperate with their counterparts in YESHA, symbolized by the addition of the mayor of Qatzrin to the membership rolls of the Golan Settlers' Council. Rabbis have even been enlisted to give a religious imprimatur to the rejection of withdrawal.

Yet as forces are mobilized for a public campaign, the likes of which has not been mounted for five years, much of the conviction against the settlers' removal appears to have dissipated. An article in *Ha'Aretz* noted, "The Golan Settlers' Council renews the struggle. Leaders proclaim militant slogans to the public, but inside they acknowledge that the game is lost."

There are reports of plans to resettle those from the Golan in the Galilee. The head of the Golan Regional Council is reported to have acknowledged that building plans in a number of settlements have been stopped due to expectations of an eventual withdrawal.

Many if not most of those Israelis who answered the call of their government to settle on the Golan appear prepared, despite their misgivings, to accept the prospect of

evacuation even if they, like most Israelis, remain skeptical about the prospect of an agreement with Damascus.

An indelicate headline in *Yedi'ot Aharonot* summarized this sentiment: "We will not move from the Golan," it proclaimed, before adding, "well, maybe for \$2.5 billion."

FOR SALE: VACATION HOMES WITH AN OPTION FOR COMPENSATION

The following article by Ofer Petersburg was published in Yedi'ot Aharonot on 29 September 1999 and translated in the November-December issue of Settlement Report.

Real estate experts report that the real estate market in the Golan has awakened in the months since the elections, after a long period of stagnation.

The reason for this development, according to the experts, is the discussion about the possibility of resuming negotiations with Syria. This has transformed the purchase of property in the Golan into a good investment, with the anticipated compensation to be paid to property owners in the event of an Israeli withdrawal.

The construction company Yifrach Abraham, which is building a new neighborhood in Qatzrin, sold ten town houses in the last two months. Every one of the buyers lives in the center of the country. Last week, the Motivation company sold 12 of 52 homes being built in a new neighborhood in the Bene Yehuda settlement. Tens of additional families are in the process of making a purchase; one-half of the 500 families that have requested information have come to visit. The houses are constructed on one-eighth of an acre [one-half dunam] at a price of between \$100,000 and \$115,000. The company's general manager has noted his surprise at the level of interest.

Of the 12 families that have recently bought homes in Bene Yehuda, almost half are purchasing a second home for investment. A resident of the Dan region [around Tel Aviv] explained, "Why shouldn't I enjoy the best of both worlds? I will enjoy a family vacation apartment whose price may increase over time, and in the event of a withdrawal, I'll benefit from compensation. It is impossible to lose in such a business!"