

Settlement Monitor

This section covers items—reprinted articles, statistics, and maps—pertaining to Israeli settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. These items are drawn from international press and reports, as well as material from Geoffrey Aronson’s invaluable 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.

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THE U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE AND THE SETTLEMENTS

“KERRY SEARCHES FOR A FRAMEWORK FOR CONTINUING TALKS”

From Settlement Report, January–February 2014.

U.S. efforts to end the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians are now focused on the presentation by Secretary of State John Kerry of a U.S.-drafted “framework for negotiations.” This will be an American document, but Kerry has said both sides may offer reservations.

Kerry told *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius on February 7 that a framework is the only way to “be able to keep the negotiations moving.” PLO president Mahmud Abbas has threatened to initiate action in the UN if the current bilateral talks, which Kerry announced 20 July 2013, fail to produce a comprehensive peace agreement by April 2014. This goal now seems impossible.

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Some skeptics think the framework is merely a placeholder designed to prolong the talks. But Kerry has a more expansive view. He told Ignatius that the framework is also needed to “give to people a sense that there can be an end to the conflict and an end of claims, that there is a framework within which it is contained.”

If indeed the U.S. will urge a clearly defined American framework for peace, it would be a major departure for U.S. peacemaking. Since the short-lived “Clinton Parameters” of 2000, the U.S. has not offered American proposals for resolving final status issues and has relied on talks between two unequal parties to make peace. Following the collapse of the Oslo process in late 2000 and Clinton’s withdrawal of his parameters, experienced diplomats and analysts have argued that Washington has failed to make peace between Israelis and Palestinians, in part, because it would not offer an American plan. They make the case that such a plan would meet the fundamental needs of both peoples, require mutual compromises and offer an endgame. If this is the premise of Kerry’s framework, it could offer new hope, generate popular support for peace, and oblige leaders to react accordingly.

Such a U.S. framework would require U.S. views on preserving Israel’s security in the context of a peace agreement calling for evacuation of Israeli military forces and civilian settlers from the West Bank. Washington’s envoy General John Allen has offered ideas and Kerry has been discussing this issue with Netanyahu and Abbas.

Land for Peace

For almost five decades, U.S. policymakers and diplomats have attempted to create the foundations for peaceful relations between Israel and its Arab enemies. When these efforts succeeded, Israel evacuated its settlers and armed forces behind secure and recognized borders, increasing the security of all parties. That remains the challenge of the current U.S. effort.

The 1978 peace agreement signed between Israel and Egypt called for the restoration of Egyptian sovereignty “down to the last centimeter” of the Israeli-occupied Sinai Peninsula. Israel’s treaty with Jordan, initialed in 1994, established an international boundary between Israel and Jordan that follows the Jordan and Yarmuk Rivers, the Dead Sea, the Emek Ha’arva/Wadi Araba, and the Gulf of Aqaba. In the West Bank, an “administrative boundary” between Jordan and the West Bank was agreed upon, without prejudice to the status of that territory.

On the Syrian front, negotiations that ultimately failed nevertheless established that the principle implemented on the Egyptian front—namely, the complete evacuation of Israeli military forces and civilians to the “June 4 line”—was an agreed-upon foundation applicable to the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. Israel’s unilateral evacuation of settlers and permanently deployed troops from the Gaza Strip in 2005 was also undertaken by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in the expectation of increasing Israeli security.

But Not for the West Bank

In contrast, Israel has not applied this core “land for peace” security doctrine to the West Bank. Instead, it remains committed to maintaining Israel’s occupation and controlling this region for historical, religious, and ideological reasons. Israel’s continuing policy of massive settlement of the West Bank is an integral part of its policy of maximizing Israeli control of the West Bank and

preventing the emergence of a viable and genuinely sovereign Palestinian state. Polls show there is still considerable bipartisan support in Israel for this policy, yet other frequent polls show that 75 percent of Israelis would accept a comprehensive peace agreement.

Various dissenting views from Israelis with military and security backgrounds have challenged Israel's Jordan Valley policies in recent years. Senior Israeli figures, including former Mossad chief Meir Dagan and members of the prestigious Council for Peace and Security have argued that Israeli security will not be threatened by an end to its military presence in the Jordan Valley in the context of peace. Many of these critics believe that Israel's fundamental "security problem" in the West Bank is its occupation and settlement of the area at the expense of Palestinians' freedom and national aspirations.

Netanyahu's Allon Plus Plan

Prime Minister Netanyahu's security views, however, have not changed since he announced his "Allon Plus" plan more than a decade ago. It proposed outright annexation of 13 percent of the West Bank, plus an additional 33 percent in the Jordan Valley under permanent Israeli military control. Since then, Netanyahu hardened this policy by opposing any diminution of Israel's military control in the Jordan Valley region or any commitment to withdraw its forces from this area.

Netanyahu's support for an all but permanent IDF deployment in Palestine, even in the context of a peace agreement, provoked a sharp response from PLO Chairman Abbas. On 2 November 2013, he described as "a lie" Israeli claims that it needed to remain in the Jordan Valley to protect Israel's security, and alleged that Israel's economic interests in the Jordan Valley are the main reason it demands indefinite control of the area.

Abbas continues to support an option for a land swap of 1.9 percent of the West Bank initially outlined during the Annapolis talks in mid-2008. On the security front, he favors a third-party military presence on West Bank territory evacuated by Israel.

On 2 February 2014, in an interview with *The New York Times*, Abbas reiterated his support for a NATO security role throughout a demilitarized Palestine, including the Jordan Valley "for a long time, and wherever they want. Not only on the eastern border but also on western borders. Everywhere . . . for a long time, for the time they wish. NATO can be everywhere, why not?" NATO, he added, "can stay to reassure the Israelis, and to protect us. We will be demilitarized. . . . Do you think we have any illusion that we can have security if the Israelis do not feel they have security?"

Abbas also offered for the first time a transition period of three (most recently extended to five) years during which Israel will evacuate all its forces from the new state, along the model of Israel's previous peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan. But he rejected a "performance test," which would be "a humiliation for us. They will make a test for us and of course we will fail."

In recent remarks, in an effort to allay Palestinian suspicions of U.S. intentions, Kerry said that although "Netanyahu has made it clear he doesn't want NATO," the role of a third party "is something for the parties to work out."

Israel's quest for absolute security is reflected in its current demand for Palestinian recognition of Israel's all-but-permanent presence in and control over the Jordan Valley. Such demands would

place an untenable burden not just on the future Palestine but also on the entire framework of peaceful relations between the two countries. The PLO continues to object in principle to the deployment of Israeli forces in the state of Palestine beyond a short, well-defined transition period. The historical record of agreements between Israel and Jordan and Egypt supports this view. An agreement that requires a continuing, long-term presence of Israeli forces beyond a secure and recognized border will not guarantee stability for either Israelis or Palestinians, but rather the opposite.

"JOHN KERRY SPEAKS OUT"

From Settlement Report, November–December 2013.

"Let me emphasize at this point the position of the United States of America on the settlements is that we consider now and have always considered the settlements to be illegitimate. And I want to make it extremely clear that at no time did the Palestinians in any way agree, as a matter of going back to the talks, that they somehow condone or accept the settlements. The Palestinians believe that the settlements are illegal. The United States has said that they believe the settlements are not helpful and are illegitimate. And there should be no connection. That is not to say that they weren't aware or we weren't aware that there would be construction. But that construction, importantly, in our judgment, would be much better off limited as much as possible in an effort to help create a climate for these talks to be able to proceed effectively."

-Remarks by Secretary of State John Kerry after a meeting with Palestinian Authority President Mahmud Abbas in Bethlehem, 6 November 2013

"Failure of the talks will increase Israel's isolation in the world. The alternative to getting back to the talks is a potential of chaos. I mean, does Israel want a third intifada?"

I believe that if we do not resolve the issues between Palestinians and Israelis, if we do not find a way to find peace, there will be an increasing isolation of Israel. There will be an increasing campaign of delegitimization of Israel that's taking place on an international basis. That if we do not resolve the question of the settlements and who lives where and how and what rights they have, if we don't end the presence of Israeli soldiers perpetually within the West Bank, then there will be an increasing feeling that if we cannot get peace with a leadership that is committed to nonviolence, you may wind up with leadership that is committed to violence."

-Remarks by Secretary of State John Kerry, Jerusalem, 7 November 2013

THE ECONOMICS OF THE SETTLEMENTS

"CROSSING THE GREEN LINE"

This article was published by Globes on 2 December 2013. It was authored by Globes's reporter Shlomit Tsur. The text is available online at www.globes-online.com.

Globes is a daily Hebrew newspaper that focuses on Israeli business news. Since 1995, Globes has been publishing English translations of some of its articles online.

The script is well-known: the Ministry of Construction and Housing plans new homes beyond the Green Line, and, immediately afterward, the Prime Minister's Office squawks to halt the activity, in response to U.S. President Barack Obama. These tensions are affecting the real estate market: years of building freezes have caused pent-up demand in settlements in the territories, boosting home prices, as a result, contractors which previously avoided the area are now bidding in tenders there.

In early November, the Israel Land Authority published a tender for a lot in Ariel zoned for 90 apartments. No less than 15 bids were submitted, and the tender was won by [Malibu Investments Inc.](#) (TASE: MLBU.B1) with a bid of NIS 12.6 million, plus NIS 4.8 million in development costs. The tender's minimum price was just NIS 271,000, and the assessor estimated the lot's value at NIS 3.5 million. Seven of the fifteen bids exceeded NIS 8 million, highlighting developers' confidence in Ariel.

This confidence is shared by [Gindi Holdings Ltd.](#) and [Meshulam Levinstein Contracting and Engineering Ltd.](#) (TASE: LEVI), suggesting that a change in the national consensus has occurred, as neither company had ever bid in a tender beyond the Green Line.

Malibu's winning bid reflected a price of NIS 200,000 per land per apartment, before VAT and development costs. In April, a winning bid in a tender for a lot zoned for 140 apartments in Ariel reflected a price of NIS 140,000 per land per apartment, before VAT and development costs—land prices in the city jumped 40 percent within six months.

The latest home sales data published by the Central Bureau of Statistics show that the contractors are right. In January-October, 943 new homes were sold in Judea and Samaria, almost 5 percent of home sales nationwide, compared with 609 homes sold in 2012 as a whole (2.7 percent of total sales), and 550 homes sold in 2011 (2.8 percent of total sales).

"Locations where it is possible to offer apartments for less than NIS 1 million are often found beyond the Green Line, because in high-demand areas the land component and development costs exceed NIS 1 million," says Malibu. "In settlements beyond the Green Line, it's easy to obtain Palestinian workers, which cuts construction costs by 20 percent. It's easier for a Palestinian worker to go to Mod'in Ilit than Ramat Gan."

The Israel Land Authority also saw strong demand in a tender for a lot zoned for 30 apartments in Efrat in late November. There were 7-9 bids. The price per land per apartment was NIS 300,000.

[Anglo-Saxon Real Estate](#) Mate Benyamin concessionaire and general manager Arik Vaknish says, "Many people who want a better home than what they can get in a city like Jerusalem are moving to settlements in the regional council. Young couples and people seeking bigger apartments are coming from neighborhoods such as Pisgat Ze'ev, Givat Ze'ev, and Neve Ya'acov, which are becoming *haredi* (ultra-orthodox), to settlements such as Anatot, Adam, Kefar Adumim, and Nili. Homes which sold for NIS 600,000 are now going for NIS 1 million, and the strongest demand is for five-room apartments."

Vaknish lives in Adam, located just 3.5 kilometers from Pisgat Ze'ev. He says he left Jerusalem's Talpiot neighborhood for the settlement 15 years ago. "There are now 1,200 families living in the settlement, and there is strong demand for new homes because people want their children to stay in the settlement and not leave. The settlement currently has a shortage of 1,000 apartments. We see our neighbors in Ramallah building at a dizzying pace, while in our area, we just begin

something small and the whole world starts up with accusations. Why does no one complain when the Palestinians build the city of Rawabi, building thousands of apartments at NIS 500,000 apiece, while we barely build? This angers us, because the development of our settlements is dynamic, but land is not released.”

[Dona Engineering and Construction Ltd.](#) built apartments in Ma’ale Adumim in the 1990s through 2006 and sold houses in Ariel in 2009-10. “We do not consider Ma’ale Adumim, the Etzion Bloc, and Efrat as the territories, but as Jerusalem’s suburbs,” says Dona VP marketing Ohad Saban. “Settlements such as Ariel, Sha’are Tikva, and Elkana are suburbs of central Israel.” He notes that the company recently sold six-room houses in Sha’are Tikva at NIS 1.8 million each.

Saban says that the results of the tender in Ariel show that residents are confident enough to buy a home there, in terms of the expected population growth, and that contractors share this confidence. He believes that contractors are confident “because of the demand for homes and because the city has a university with 10,000 students. Despite the proximity of Rosh Ha’Ayin, there is still a difference in prices: a four-room apartment in Ariel costs NIS 900,000, compared with NIS 1.2 million in Rosh Ha’Ayin.”

Saban says, “Ma’ale Adumim is a 5–10 minute drive from Jerusalem’s eastern neighborhoods, and is considered a sought-after town by Jerusalemites. After we built 1,000 apartments in Ma’ale Adumim, construction was halted for diplomatic reasons, causing home prices to rise. Irrespective of the thousands of apartments that could be sold, there is potential to cool down the market.”

[Bemuna Ltd.](#) builds for the religious public. Bemuna CEO Israel Zeira says, “Prices are rising in part because of the government’s astonishing decisions to dry up many settlements. Efrat, Ma’ale Adumim, Beitar Ilit, and others were never included in the Israel Land Authority’s marketing map until this year, which sent land prices soaring, up to NIS 400,000 per land per apartment, including development.”

Zeira adds, “For the sake of comparison, a few months ago, land was marketed in Beer Yaakov [a Tel Aviv suburb], which is seeing strong demand and rapid development, at exactly the same price of NIS 400,000 per land per apartment. There is no question that home prices beyond the Green Line will start from NIS 1 million at best. Anyone who opposes development in politically disputed areas is eliminating a substantial part of the State of Israel’s land, so it will be no wonder if prices start to rise. A large part of the blame for the rise in home prices in recent years is because of the policy to freeze, openly or clandestinely, construction, including in Jerusalem.”

No Building in Ma’ale Adumim

“In Ma’ale Adumim, 1,000 housing units used to be built a year, and now, because of the diplomatic situation, barely 150 units are being built annually, which is not enough. It’s not even the minimum needed for the city’s natural population growth,” says Ma’ale Adumim Mayor Benny Kashriel. “There is no more land in Jerusalem, which is why residents are coming to Ma’ale Adumim, especially from neighborhoods such as Pisgat Ze’ev, Gilo, and Har Homa, because of the high density in those neighborhoods, and because they are becoming *haredi*.”

“Because there is demand for 4,000 apartments a year in Jerusalem, and the city’s land reserves are used up, Jerusalemites usually go to two places: Ma’ale Adumim, which is oriented to Jerusalem; and to Mod’in, which is oriented to Tel Aviv. When building in Ma’ale Adumim is frozen, central

Israel benefits, because Jerusalemites move to Mod'in, boosting the purchasing power in central Israel.”

As for the E1 site, zoned for 3,500 housing units, Kashriel says, “Ma’ale Adumim has 40,000 residents and could potentially have 100,000. We’ll have another 50,000 residents with or without E1, because we’re already working with the Civil Administration on planning land for 5,000 housing units in the city, and which does not include E1. Until now, the prime minister and the defense minister have not intervened in the planning process and the decision to stop the planning was exceptional.

“There are advantages to building in our area, because of the proximity of Palestinian cities, which provide available labor. Palestinians have a problem crossing the Green Line to work, so it’s easy to work in construction in Ma’ale Adumim. They come in the morning to work, and return to Ramallah in the evening, without the need for bureaucratic permits like the Chinese need. Moreover, a Palestinian earns \$250 a month in Ramallah, and here he earns \$1,000-1,200 a month, because Israeli labor laws apply here.

“We recently offered for sale 44 400-square meter lots zoned for private houses under build-your-own-home plans, in which the minimum price was NIS 600,000. All the lots were sold for NIS 800,000-1.2 million, including development costs. I didn’t believe we’d achieve such prices.”

Melisron Crosses the Line

“When we bought the Ma’ale Adumim Mall five years ago, it was failing,” says Melisron CEO Avi Levy. “It was failing because it was far away, had no brands or retail chains, and local residents avoided it, preferring to shop in Jerusalem. The moment Melisron-British Israel entered the picture, it brought brands and retail chains . . . and the residents followed. The Ma’ale Adumim Mall has one of the fastest growing store turnover growth. Five years ago, turnover growth began at 50–100 percent, and the annual growth is now 15–20 percent. Because of the growth in demand, we decided to build a cinema and approached Globus, which is building four movie halls.”

Levy says, “There is room to do business in the territories too, and it’s a fact that the mall operates exactly like malls elsewhere.”

However, asked whether Melisron would build another mall beyond the Green Line, Levy says that, for the company, there is no financial justification for another mall in the territories in terms of purchasing power.

SETTLER VIOLENCE

“SETTLER VIOLENCE: IT COMES WITH THE TERRITORY”

This article was published by +972 Magazine on 21 January 2014. It was authored by +972 contributor Larry Derfner. The text is available at www.972mag.com.

Kamal Shaban, a farmer in the West Bank village of Sinjil, is watching workmen repair a local family’s house that had recently been firebombed by settlers in the middle of the night, forcing the parents and five children asleep inside to flee to the rooftop. As for himself, Shaban tells me that

during the autumn olive harvests, settlers have stoned the laborers in his fields, turned over a tractor, stolen sacks of olives, and once broke a worker's arm with a big rock—all under the eye of Israeli soldiers required by the Supreme Court to protect the farmers.

He asks: “Why do the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations call Hamas terrorists and Hezbollah terrorists, but they don't call these people terrorists?”

The phenomenon of settler violence against Palestinians, which is as old and as vibrant as the settlements themselves, tells you everything you need to know about how serious Israel is about ending its rule over a foreign people. It also tells you everything you need to know about how serious the world is about forcing Israel to end it.

Settler violence, lately characterized mainly by masked young men roaming the West Bank and attacking Palestinian farmers with stones, clubs, or rifles and burning their olive groves, their fields, and occasionally their schools, mosques, and homes, is a unique feature of the occupation. Unlike every other aspect of it—the conquest of another people's homeland by military force and land theft, the brutality, the house demolitions, and expulsions, the whole system of officially sanctioned subjugation—settler violence is something nobody outside the radical fringe in Israel will defend. This, alone, they'll denounce.

And yet it goes on. The world doesn't penalize or even threaten to penalize Israel for it.

If a decades-long reign of terror on unarmed Palestinians by Jewish gangs backed by an army of occupation is tolerable, not only to Israel but to the United Nations, European Union, United States, and the rest of the world, then everything Israel does to the Palestinians is tolerable. Then the occupation as a whole is tolerable.

An Attack Each Day

Settlers attack Palestinians in the West Bank on an average of once a day, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Last year, there were 399 assaults—93 in which Palestinians were injured, another 306 in which their property was damaged or destroyed. The frequency of these attacks has stayed fairly stable over the last four years, but it is quadruple the rate in 2006, when OCHA began tracking these incidents.

As we drove in Zakaria Sadah's van up Route 60 through the northern part of the West Bank, he pointed out some of the landmarks. “In this house we're passing,” he narrated, “a group of settlers went in and attacked a mother and her children, stripped their clothes off, sent them to the hospital. That house over there, about 15 settlers set it on fire, some soldiers were in on it, too. In that village over there they burned the sports hall, uprooted olive trees three or four times . . .”

Sadah, the West Bank field worker for Rabbis for Human Rights, takes us through the heartland of the “price tag” movement—near the Nablus-area settlement Yitzhar and the settler outposts Esh Kodesh, Adei Ad, Shvut Rachel, Kida, and Ahiya, and, surrounded by them, two of the most frequently targeted Palestinian villages, Jalud and Sinjil.

“In the seat you're sitting in,” he tells me, “the ambassador from Belgium sat, diplomats from the EU sat, the UN, the U.S. Next week, I'm taking someone from the American consulate so he can see what the settlers are doing. I take foreign VIPs on tours about once a month, and they're all shocked at what they see.”

After they get over being shocked, do they do anything with what they've learned?

"No," said Sadah. "Some of them say they're going to talk to somebody, they're going to change things. Nothing happens."

"There's a lack of political will to stop the violence."

Connie Martinez-Varela Pedersen, director of international advocacy for Yesh Din, one of the most vital Israeli human rights organizations working in the West Bank, says she's talked to diplomats from around 20 countries about the issue of settler violence, and gives regular briefings about it to European, American, and Canadian officials. They duly report on the attacks and Israel's response to them back to their foreign ministries or other relevant departments in their home countries.

"They get it," Pedersen says. "They get that there's a lack of political will to stop the violence. The sense you get from them is—here we are talking about the same issue again. In a way there's nothing to even talk about. It's a no-brainer—it's so obvious to everyone that there's something wrong."

That's the feeling I had when I called a European diplomat stationed in Israel to talk to him about the issue: the very clear sense that we both knew what the other thinks about it because there's nothing else one could possibly think, so what is there to discuss? But just to hear it from the mouth of someone representing the big wide world in this country, I called him, and he spoke on condition that he wouldn't be identified.

"European diplomats in Israel are definitely aware of the problem, we've written a joint report about it in the names of all the member states of the EU, it's been mentioned in the conclusions of the European Council. There have also been private demarches [diplomatic statements, often protests] about it from individual EU countries to Israeli authorities. We're mostly concerned with the issue of impunity for the settler attackers."

Do you think these reports and demarches affect Israel's handling of the problem?

"No, I don't think so."

I asked him why he thought that was. He laughed drily; what could he say?

What effect, I asked, does Israel's indifference to these reports and demarches have on the European diplomatic corps in this country?

"Well, I think it leads to a measure of frustration."

"My God, they're burning down the house!"

The high-water mark of international recognition of the problem of settler violence, in the view of people at Yesh Din, was President Obama's remark about it in his speech at the Jerusalem Convention Center last March. "It is not just when settler violence against Palestinians goes unpunished," the president said.

We drove into the village of Sinjil, where one of the worst settler attacks on Palestinians in recent years took place on 14 November. At about two in the morning, a car carrying four young men passed an isolated house at the end of a road where Khaled Dar Khalil, his wife Rowaida and their five children, ages 16 months to eight years, were sleeping. Two young men got out of the car, poured gasoline under the porch, broke the glass enclosure in front, threw Molotov cocktails through the windows, and drove away.

“My husband saw it from our bedroom window upstairs. He was yelling, ‘My God, they’re burning down the house!’” said Rowaida. The front door was blocked by fire, the house was filling up with smoke, so the family ran up the stairs and out onto the roof, where they waited for the Palestinian fire department to arrive.

That was not the first time the property had been firebombed; Molotov cocktails were thrown at the yard about six months before and about two years before that, Rowaida said. “The house is pretty exposed,” she said by way of explanation. Khaled said Israeli police showed up to investigate, and he’s gotten telephone calls since from a detective who, he said, “seems interested.”

The day after this latest arson at the home, a driver pulled up in front and called out to Rowaida, “I’m coming back to burn what’s left of you,” and took off, she recalls.

Workmen were at the house the day I was there; it needs heavy repairs for the collapsed ceilings and other damage. The parents and children are okay, except for three-year-old Nisreen. “She’s still scared,” said Khaled. “She cries at night.”

Rowaida spoke to me in English with an Americanized accent. The 38-year-old woman said she lived in Springfield, Massachusetts, for many years before and after her marriage, and, like her husband and children, is a U.S. citizen.

“People from the American consulate came here after the fire,” she said. “They’ve called me a couple of times since to see how we’re doing.”

All American citizens, the family of seven, including five children, were the victims of a murder attempt because they are Palestinian, their house was firebombed in the middle of the night by Israel’s lords of the land. It was the third time the family had been targeted with Molotov cocktails by these people in two years—and not a word of protest was heard from the United States.

I wanted to ask the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv about it, but my request for an interview was denied. It seems that one 11-word sentence in Obama’s speech didn’t have such a huge impact on Israeli or American policy toward the problem of “settler violence against Palestinians going unpunished.”

It’s understood that Israel could stop the violence if it wanted to, but for obvious domestic political reasons it doesn’t want to: Israel has no intention of taking harsh, extended measures against any part of the settler movement. Thus, the general view is that Israel chooses to turn a blind eye to these Jewish terrorists.

“Israel is a country that zapped Sheikh Yassin from the skies, that seemed to know about every terror bombing a day before it happened. Israel can get shit done. They really can stop this,” said the Israel-Palestine bureau chief of a major foreign news organization.

“The clearest proof that there is no serious intent to stop the violence is the olive harvest. There’s always a [spike in violence](#) during the harvest, which comes in October, and the army accompanies the farmers to the olive groves, so it knows exactly where the violence is taking place. It’s a perfect opportunity to catch the settler attackers, but they don’t,” said Reut Mor, spokesperson for Yesh Din.

[A recent Yesh Din study found that 97.4 percent](#) of Israel Police investigations into the destruction of Palestinian-owned olive and fruit trees are closed due to what the NGO’s lawyers termed “circumstances testifying to investigative failure.”

In the old hillside village of Jalud, which faces the hilltop outposts Esh Kodesh, Ahiya, and Shvut Rachel a few hundred meters away, farmer Ibrahim Haj Mohammed says he’s lost hundreds of trees

to settler attacks over the years. “I’ve complained to the police more than 10 times—once I got a telephone call back from them,” he says.

On 9 October, a couple of dozen settlers converged on Jalud. One group threw rocks at pupils in the village elementary school while a second group threw rocks at villagers’ cars and a third group set fire to olive groves, including Mohammed’s.

“I made a complaint that day to the police,” he says, “and two or three days later I went to the Sha’ar Binyamin station to see what was happening. I spoke to a policeman and he said, ‘Your case is being handled by a detective who is on holiday today, and if he needs you, we will talk to you.’ Nobody’s contacted me since.”

Yet the problem goes beyond Israeli authorities turning a blind eye; when soldiers get to the scene of a settler attack on Palestinians, as often as not they stand by obediently—as seen in this B’Tselem video of a 6 January [settler attack on the village of Urif](#)—and take action only after the Palestinians start throwing rocks back, which is when the troops turn their tear gas and rubber-coated (but potentially lethal) bullets on the Palestinians.

“The village of Burin, which is between Yitzhar and a row of Har Bracha outposts, sometimes gets attacked by settlers three times a week. They always have the army with them, and when the young Palestinians in the village start throwing stones back, the army attacks the village. It works every time. The settlers know that if they start, the army will finish up, and much more brutally than they can manage. And they know nothing will happen to them—even if they’re arrested, the case will be closed, they’ll never get indicted,” said Reut Mor.

“There’s no way three settlers would attack an entire village with stones if they didn’t know they had armed soldiers behind them,” adds Mor.

“A couple of years ago a teenager was killed in Qusra—like it always happens, the settlers from Esh Kodesh came down to destroy their crops, then the villagers threw stones at them, then Israeli soldiers came, and the Palestinians see them as one with the settlers, so they started throwing stones at the soldiers, too, and the soldiers opened fire,” said B’Tselem spokesperson Sarit Michaeli.

(Many readers are by now no doubt wondering: what about Palestinian violence against settlers, not to mention against other Israelis? My answer is that there is no comparing the violence of people living under colonial rule with that of the colonists.)

Price tag: “A brilliant exercise in branding.”

The popular term for settler violence in recent years is “price tag”—“*tag mechir*” in Hebrew—which settlers often spray paint on a Palestinian mosque, house, or car they’ve torched. The idea is that the attack is the “price tag” the settlers are putting on the most recent action by the army or government that they consider harmful to their cause, or on the most recent Palestinian attack against Israelis. (On occasion, such graffiti has accompanied settler arsons against left-wing Israeli activists, churches, and army property.)

The term emerged after the 2005 disengagement from Gaza and evacuation of the West Bank outpost Amona in early 2006, signaling yet another escalation in settler militancy. It has been a hugely successful propaganda tool for the settlers for two reasons: One, it conveys the message that these attacks are reprisals, even self-defense. Two, as Yesh Din’s Mor says, “It shifts all the

attention to the attacks accompanied by ‘price tag’ graffiti, and gives the impression that this is all the settler violence there is, when in fact it’s a very small portion. ‘Price-tag’ was a brilliant exercise in branding by the settlers.”

If there is a single image that illustrates how settler persecution of Palestinians is an accepted fact of life, it is the chain-link and cloth netting hung over stretches of the souk in Hebron to catch at least some of the rocks, bricks, bottles, soiled diapers, eggs, urine, bleach, and other ammunition tossed over from the adjacent Avraham Avinu and Beit Hadassah buildings, where most of Hebron’s settlers live. Above the souk are two Israeli army lookout posts with a clear view of what goes on below.

“We yell up to the soldiers to stop the settlers from attacking us, but they don’t pay any attention,” Jamal Maraga, who runs a fabric stall in the souk, told me early this month, pointing out the scarves on display that had been stained by eggs. A boy showed me a brick that had fallen out of the sky recently. A man who’d been hit in the chest with a rock a couple of days before was giving the details to a pair of Norwegian observers from TIPH, the Temporary International Presence in Hebron. In the previous week, the souk vendors had closed up their shops to protest the army’s failure to protect them from settler assaults.

“We expect that they are actually using the information.”

The people from TIPH say the level of settler attacks against Palestinians in Hebron has gone down in recent years. An official with a foreign agency operating in Hebron put it this way: “The Palestinians in the city, what can I say, have given up the fight. They have to survive, so they are very patient with the settlers. They know their children are exposed to the settlers’ children, and there’s a lot of tension. They’re neighbors after all.”

TIPH, whose observers have been patrolling the Jewish-Arab seam line in Hebron since 1997, stays absolutely neutral. It records every disturbance of the peace, whether by settler, soldier, or Palestinian, and sends confidential reports to its six member nations (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Italy, and Turkey) as well as to Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

I asked the head of the TIPH mission, Christine Fossen, a lawyer and local police chief in Norway, what those countries do with the documentation of settler attacks on the city’s Palestinians.

“They follow our reports closely, they’re working mostly in diplomatic channels,” she said. “We don’t know what different diplomatic missions do, but we know they are very interested in what we are writing and we expect that they are actually using that information.”

Settler Violence isn’t New, So it Ceases to be of Interest

One of the reasons settler violence doesn’t create much of a ripple internationally is that outside of Israel, it rarely makes the news. “Dog bites man is not news, and settlers behaving badly is dog bites man,” said the local bureau chief, who’s been covering this region for many years. “And it’s not new, it’s been going on for decades, so it ceases to be of interest.”

Presumably that’s why the 7 January incident in the West Bank village of Qusra, where settlers once again attacked Palestinian farmers but this time [got caught and beat up by the villagers](#), did make the international news—marauding settlers getting their clocks cleaned by their Palestinian targets is, [as Yossi Gurvitz wrote](#), a case of man bites dog.

Some village leaders protected the 15 or so settlers from possibly getting lynched by an angry crowd of locals before turning them over to the army. Some of the settlers escaped the soldiers' grasp, while the others were brought before a judge and ordered under house arrest for five days. Zakaria Sadah of Rabbis for Human Rights, who helped the village leaders protect the settlers from the crowd, said the invaders destroyed about 40 olive trees before being caught.

In Qusra they were celebrating that night. The village imam, Ziad Oudeh—who Sadah said was also one of the locals protecting the settlers from further harm—told *Ha'Aretz* it was “like a wedding. People sang ‘God is great’ all night. For four years we’ve been suffering from these settlers, and people feel we’ve paid them back.” Sadah said village leaders told him that in recent years, Qusra has been attacked by settlers 66 times.

In Israel, the pathetic spectacle of these frightened, bleeding young fanatics, and the fact that Palestinians who are ordinarily their victims saved their lives and handed them over to the army, provided another occasion for officials to decry the “price tag” phenomenon and pledge to uproot it.

Empty Pledges to Act

Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon said, “The unacceptable trend known as ‘price tag’ is in my opinion terror in every sense of the word, and we are acting and will act against the perpetrators, firmly and with zero tolerance, in order to eradicate it.”

His statement echoed the one last June from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the torching of cars and spraying of anti-Arab graffiti in Abu Ghosh, an Israeli Arab village popular for its tourist restaurants. “What happened today in Abu Ghosh,” said Netanyahu, “goes against Judaism’s *mitzvot* [commandments] and against the values of our people and our state. Just this week we made decisions that allow us to act more forcefully against the people who commit these crimes and we will do so with full force.”

Netanyahu's predecessor, Ehud Olmert, [twice used the word “pogrom” in late 2008](#) to describe separate shooting attacks on Palestinians by settlers from Yitzhar and Hebron. “In the State of Israel, there will be no pogroms against non-Jews,” he told his cabinet. “This is an intolerable phenomenon and it will be dealt with in the strongest way by Israel’s law enforcement authorities.”

Unacceptable. Terror in every sense of the word. Zero tolerance. Against our values. Pogroms.

The Esh Kodesh settlers' ill-fated attack in Qusra on 7 January was the first incident of settler violence cited by [OCHA in its weekly report](#) from the occupied territories for 7–13 January. It was not, however, the last.

“At least five other settler attacks recorded during the remainder of the week were reportedly carried out by settlers in retaliation for the Qusra incident,” OCHA wrote. “A total of six Palestinian vehicles were burned or damaged near Jalazun refugee camp (Ramallah), in Funduq (Qalqilya), and in Kafr Haris (Salfit). Settler raids also took place in Sinjil and [Madama](#) (Nablus), during which ‘price-tag’ slogans, such as ‘death to the Arabs,’ were sprayed on houses and shops.”

On 15 January, the day after the most recent of OCHA's weekly reports was issued, [a mosque in the northern West Bank village of Dayr Istya was torched](#); luckily the fire didn't spread beyond the front door. *Ha'Aretz* reported that the graffiti “Arabs out,” “Regards from Qusra,” and “Revenge for spilled blood in Qusra,” was sprayed on the mosque's walls.

All in a day's work. This is nothing new in the annals of the occupation, nor in the annals of colonialism; the bold young men of history's settler movements have never been known for their decency toward the "natives." The only unique thing about Israeli settler violence is that it grows out of the Israeli occupation, which is the only outpost, excuse the pun, of colonialism still standing in the so-called democratic world. And as long as that occupation lasts, so will settler violence. Literally, it comes with the territory.

PALESTINIANS AND THE SETTLEMENTS

"SETTLER-DRIVEN ARCHAEOLOGY PLAN THREATENS TO PUSH HEBRON FAMILY OFF FARMLAND"

This article was published by Electronic Intifada on 23 January 2014. It was authored by freelance journalist and frequent EI contributor Patrick O. Strickland. The text is available at www.electronicintifada.net.

Israeli settlers recently began an alleged archaeological excavation on two plots of land surrounding a Palestinian family's homes in the Tel Rumeida neighborhood of Hebron.

Feryal Abu Haikal, 68, is a retired school principal and mother of 11. She told *Electronic Intifada* that settlers and soldiers arrived on 5 January and razed the orchards her family had farmed for decades. "They ripped out 50 of our almond trees. Some of [the trees] were over 60 years old."

The Abu Haikal family owns the land, on which its four homes are located. Yet the family has also been renting and farming the neighboring two plots of land—six *dunams*, or almost an acre and a half—for more than 65 years (a *dunam* is equal to 1,000 square meters).

Originally belonging to the Islamic Waqf society, a large area of land in Tel Rumeida was rented to a Jewish organization in Hebron during the time of the British Mandate of Palestine (1920–1948). From that broader area, the organization first rented the two plots of land to the Abu Haikal family.

Following the 1948 Nakba—the forced displacement of Palestinians ahead of Israel's establishment—the West Bank came under Jordanian control. The two plots of land were placed under the care of the Jordanian government, which continued to rent them to the Abu Haikal family.

Closed Military Zone

Following Israel's 1967 occupation of the West Bank, the family continued to rent these plots from an Israeli Jewish religious foundation as protected tenants. In 2002, the Israeli army invoking "security reasons," built a fence and declared the area a closed military zone.

Israeli settlers claim the two plots of land are home to the burial site of Yishai and Ruth the Moabite, figures present in Islamic, Christian, and Jewish traditions. Similar to plans in several other areas in occupied East Jerusalem and the broader West Bank, they plan to build an archaeological park.

The Israeli government is financing the project to the tune of an estimated seven million shekels (around \$2 million), according to the Israeli daily *Ha'Aretz* ("[Israeli government funding dig in Palestinian Hebron, near Jewish enclave](#)," 9 January 2014).

Abu Haikal fears that the settlers have larger plans than what they have publicly declared. “Seven million shekels . . . it’s not possible they will stop [the excavation project] after just two pieces of land,” she said.

“What kind of project needs seven million shekels from the Israeli cultural ministry? They’re going to excavate throughout all of Tel Rumeida.”

Because the military has erected fences closing off the area, the Abu Haikal family’s homes are only accessible by one narrow entrance. On two sides of the homes are closed military zones they are forbidden from entering, and on the other side is an Israeli military base and settlement.

In Hebron, there is a permanent presence of more than 3,000 soldiers to protect a settler population of only around 600 persons.

Tel Rumeida is situated in the H2 area of the city, which is under complete Israeli military control and puts Palestinian residents in constant contact with both settlers and soldiers. “The problem is not just the number of settlers here. It’s also how they think,” said Abu Haikal.

Violent Reputation

Israeli settlers in Tel Rumeida have a reputation as some of the most violent in the West Bank. Among them is Baruch Marzel, a U.S.-born settler and former spokesperson for Kach, a right-wing Zionist group that has been deemed a terrorist organization by the United States, Canada, the European Union, and Israel.

Over the years, Abu Haikal has accumulated several videos and photographs of settlers and soldiers attacking local Palestinian residents, including her children. The scenes include Israeli tanks rolling across her yard and soldiers violently arresting Palestinians.

Around 20 settlers, while working on the excavation, recently “threw rocks and smashed out eight house windows on the first and second floor of our house,” said Abu Haikal. “They also attacked some of our neighbors.”

Although Israeli settlers assault Tel Rumeida’s residents on a near-daily basis, the Israeli military has only bothered to arrest Palestinians.

As the settlers uprooted their almond trees on 5 January, Abu Haikal’s nephew Sami was arrested after entering the excavation area. Soldiers told the family he had broken the law by going into a closed military zone.

“The settlers attack Palestinian homes, throw stones, and often physically beat up Palestinians, including women and kids,” said Issa Amro, coordinator of Youth Against Settlements, a Hebron-based group that raises awareness about Israel’s activities in the city.

Goal of Displacement

He told the *Electronic Intifada* that the areas of the city under the most pressure right now are Tel Rumeida, Shuhada Street, and the Ibrahimi Mosque.

“In these areas, the soldiers are arresting kids, detaining them and giving them a hard time. It’s putting more pressure on us . . . for the goal of displacing Palestinians here.”

An Israeli soldier allegedly threatened to kill a Palestinian schoolgirl near the Ibrahimi Mosque as she was making her way home, reported *Ma’an News Agency* last week (“[Hebron schoolgirl says Israeli soldier threatened to kill her](#),” 15 January 2014).

Hamed Salem, the chairperson of Birzeit University's archaeology department, spoke to *The Electronic Intifada* about Israel's use of archaeology to implement expansionist policies.

"This is one of the many illegal excavations taking place," Salem said, referring to the digs in Hebron.

"Archaeology as Propaganda"

Rather than being a legitimate archaeological project, Salem noted, it is about "the settlers' political agenda. They are using archaeology as propaganda to justify their presence" in Hebron.

Salem added that the archaeological park in Tel Rumeida "comes from the same idea" as other excavations used by Israeli settlers and authorities to displace Palestinians.

In Silwan, a Palestinian neighborhood in occupied East Jerusalem, an Israeli settler organization has established the City of David, a state-funded archaeological park.

In Khirbat Susiya, a village in the South Hebron Hills, Palestinian residents were expelled from their original lands in 1986 after Israel declared the area an archaeological zone. Today, they live only a few hundred meters away, dwelling in caves and shaky wooden structures that are frequently bulldozed by Israel's military.

For Tel Rumeida, the expansion of settlements will translate into more settlers, soldiers, and violence against Palestinians. Yet Abu Haikal promised that her family is there to stay.

"I love Tel Rumeida," she said "It's in my blood. I'd rather die than leave."

"DOWN THE ROAD FROM SODASTREAM, A COMPLICATED COEXISTENCE"

This article was published by Ha'Aretz on 30 January 2014. It was authored by Judy Maltz, a journalist with Ha'Aretz. The article is available at www.haaretz.com.

MISHOR ADUMIM, West Bank—The Shweiki glass factory, with its sleek outer façade and interior, stands out among the mostly shabby-looking low-tech plants, carpentries, workshops, and garages that populate this industrial zone just outside the Jewish settlement of Ma'ale Adumim.

But there's something even more fundamental that sets it apart: Shweiki is an Arab-owned enterprise.

Its ultra-modern glass factory is just a few hundred meters down the road from SodaStream, the company that recently thrust this small industrial park into the international limelight when it hired American celebrity Scarlett Johansson to serve as the global ambassador for its soda machines—at a time when the movement to boycott goods made in the occupied territories is gathering momentum abroad.

A Boycotted Palestinian Firm

But the managers at Shweiki, established in 1936 by an East Jerusalem family, insists that they get an even worse rap than their Jewish counterparts. On the one hand, the Israeli Ministry of Defense refuses to give its seal of approval to the company's shatterproof glass, while on the other, the Palestinian Authority boycotts its products.

"The Palestinians in Ramallah say we're no better than the settlers," explains Amran Shaloud, production manager at the plant, which moved to Mishor Adumim seven years ago.

Things tend to get complicated here, as stories like his would suggest. Sprawled over nearly 400 acres in the middle of the Judean Desert, a 15-minute drive from Jerusalem, Mishor Adumim is home today to close to 300 factories and small enterprises, including a bowling alley, two huge supermarkets, a small art museum, the huge Extal aluminum company, and several kosher wineries. These businesses, including a very few owned by Arabs, are entitled to special tax breaks, as Mishor Adumim is an area designated for preferential treatment under Israeli law.

SodaStream is among the biggest operations, both physically and in terms of turnover, in this industrial zone. Surrounded by an ugly concrete wall topped with barbed wire, its manufacturing plant is situated just at the edge of Mishor Adumim, in clear view of local Palestinian children from nearby villages riding around on donkeys. SodaStream headquarters rejected a request from *Ha'Aretz* earlier this week to pay a visit to its Mishor Adumim factory, saying: "We are not hosting such tours at this time."

But other factories in the industrial zone were quick to open their doors and make their case for operating in this particular location. Most of these businesses, like SodaStream, rely heavily on Palestinian labor—in some cases, almost exclusively.

In defending her decision to represent an Israeli company based in occupied territory, Johansson this week cited the livelihood and welfare of these Palestinian workers. This claim echoed in numerous conversations with Jewish managers here this week.

"We can move our factories elsewhere, so it's not a big problem for us, but they'll lose their jobs," notes Ami Cohen, the chief financial officer at Emesh, an upscale wood-furnishings manufacturer.

"Where else do they get paid like this, and where else do they have conditions like this? I give them time to pray every day and even provide them with water to wash their feet. Trust me, if you weren't a journalist, my workers here would tell you that they'd rather that there not be any Palestinian state at all."

But most of the local Jewish factory owners and operators acknowledge that it was not deep concern for the plight of local Palestinians that prompted them to set up shop in Mishor Adumim. Aside from the special tax benefits and the lower municipal taxes, there were also very basic geographic considerations.

"Because of the location, Palestinians can get to work here easily," explains Akiva (who requested that his surname not be published), a manager at a local winery. "If they were working in Atarot [another industrial zone outside Jerusalem], they'd have to get up at four in the morning to make sure they could be at work by seven, because they'd have to go through checkpoints then. Here they don't have to do that. Depending upon where they come from, it can take them less than a half hour to get to work, and that's a big plus for people here."

"No Problems with Location"

Seated at Miro's, a popular local eatery known for its home-style cooking, are Yoram and Gilad, two brothers who run a large electronic appliances outlet store here. There was nothing ideological about their decision to set up a business over the Green Line, they insist. "We're from Jerusalem, but there's no available storage space in Jerusalem for an operation like this, and that's why we had to come here," says Gilad.

The managers of Emesh describe their factory as a model of Jewish-Arab coexistence. “About two-thirds of our workers are Palestinians,” says Eli Gelman, the production manager, who lives in the nearby settlement of Kefar Adumim. “They come from all over the place. We’ve got workers here from Ramallah, from Bethlehem and even from Hebron. Trust me, if they had better options in Hebron, they wouldn’t trek all the way here.”

A team of Palestinian workers from the factory, he volunteers, is now in England, doing some carpentry work for clients there.

So nobody’s threatening to boycott you overseas?

“Not at all. Most of our clients abroad are wealthy Jews, and they have no problems whatsoever with our location.”

Gelman circulates among the workers on the production floor, giving instructions in Hebrew and in English for those who don’t speak Hebrew. He motions to Ashraf, a curly-haired man in his forties, to join him and tells him to feel free to answer a reporter’s questions.

Does Ashraf have any reservations about working in a Jewish-owned factory in occupied territory? “I could care less,” he responds. “The one thing I care about is being able to put some food on the table for my kids.”

But couldn’t he find work closer to home in Ramallah? “Yes, but the bosses there aren’t as good as the bosses here,” he responds, as Gelman smiles on encouragingly.

Osama, a 24-year-old from Bethlehem, says it was the salary that brought him to Mishor Adumim. “I couldn’t find a job that pays as well near where I live,” he says.

Not far down the road, at the huge Rami Levy supermarket, a group of Arab workers congregates outside the back of the building, where they hold their midday prayers. About half a dozen others sit down around a picnic table near the parking lot and share a communal lunch of cooked lentils, served in a huge aluminum pot. Issa, their self-appointed spokesman, runs the fresh produce department of the supermarket.

“I’m happy to talk about anything but politics,” says the 36-year-old, who hails from the nearby village of Azariyya and describes his marital status as “four kids, but only one wife.”

Relations between the Jewish and Arab workers at Rami Levy are “excellent,” he says. “We’re all friends with each other on Facebook and sometimes we even eat together.”

Does he have a problem working for a Jewish-owned establishment in the occupied territories? “It’s my livelihood,” he responds and quickly changes the subject.

A few blocks down, at Miro’s, the regular lunch crowd has settled in—with no exceptions, all Jewish.

“I tried to get Arabs to come here and even offered them a special deal, but they prefer to buy their lunch at the local supermarkets,” explains the proprietor, Miro Mizrahi, as he takes orders from his longtime assistant, Mohammed.

The apparently self-imposed segregation at lunchtime is also reflected, though in a more subtle form, in factory premises around the industrial zone. Although Jews and Arabs do spend many hours each day together here in common spaces, it is by-and-large the Arabs who are down on the production floor working the machinery and the Jews upstairs in the posh offices, at large desks behind computer screens.

The rare exception would be factories like Schweiki, where not a Jew is in sight. “It’s hard for us to hire Jews here because we’re closed on Fridays, but open on Saturday, and that wouldn’t be comfortable for them,” explains Shaloud, whose factory is right next door to Jewish-run Emesh.

Shaloud is taking a late-afternoon break, talking to a friend, Samih Owweida, who runs an aluminum factory down the road.

“As Arabs, we get it from both ends,” gripes Owweida. “I want to sell my stuff in the West Bank, and nobody will buy from me there.”

And then, with a big sigh, he throws up his hands in despair and utters a small prayer: “Let there just be peace already, so we can finish with this whole mess.”

“PALESTINIAN WORKERS CROWDING WEST BANK BUSES, RIGHT-WING ACTIVISTS COMPLAIN”

This article was published by Ha’Aretz on 26 November 2013. It was authored by the Ha’Aretz correspondent for the Jewish settlements in the West Bank, Chaim Levinson. The article is available at www.haaretz.com.

Pro-settlement activists have launched a campaign against two of the Likud’s most right-wing Knesset members over the crowding caused by Palestinian workers’ growing use of Israeli buses in the northern West Bank.

The activists accuse Transportation Minister Yisrael Katz and his deputy, Tzipi Hotovely, of ignoring the distress the overcrowded buses has caused residents of the settlements. On Monday night, they plastered dozens of West Bank buses with giant stickers bearing pictures of the two Likud politicians and the slogan, “They don’t use public transportation.”

The stickers are just the first stage of the battle, the activists vowed.

The increase in the number of Palestinians working in Israel in the past year has led to overcrowding on the bus lines that travel between Samaria (the northern West Bank) and central Israel. The lines also serve major settlements, like Ariel and Karnei Shomron.

Right-wing activists are divided over how best to solve the problem. Some, like MK Moti Yogeve (Jewish Home), think Palestinians should be forbidden to ride the buses. Others simply think the frequency of the buses should be increased.

But, now, the battle has turned personal—in part because Katz and Hotovely wouldn’t have done as well as they did in last year’s Likud primary had they not won the votes of thousands of residents of settlements. “They boast of their support for the settlement movement, but ignore the daily harm caused to thousands of residents of Samaria,” said one activist, who asked to remain anonymous.

Though officials in the settlements have periodically called for separate bus lines for Jews and Palestinians in the West Bank, they “haven’t contributed anything, because the ones responsible for the crowding are Katz and Hotovely, and the settlement leadership has protected them,” one activist charged. “The Samaritan leadership is afraid to confront the minister and his deputy, even though they’re responsible for the daily suffering of the residents. We decided to take the battle into our own hands and focus on those directly responsible for the situation.”

“Our leadership prefers its narrow political interests, and those of the minister and his deputy, to the residents’ quality of life,” another charged.

In response to the residents' complaints, the Transportation Ministry inaugurated a new bus line in March that picks Palestinians up at a West Bank checkpoint near Qalqilya and takes them directly to work sites in Israel. The police were supposed to make sure the Palestinians used these buses only, for security reasons, but the rule has never been enforced. Palestinians continue to travel to Israel on the regular lines as well.

Katz's office concurred with the activists that the cabinet's decision to increase the number of Palestinians working in Israel has resulted in "the number of [bus] passengers exceeding the number of seats."

However, it added in a statement, "The Transportation Ministry has done everything in its power to ease some of the overcrowding. It organized buses from the Eyal Checkpoint to workplaces in Israel for the Palestinians, but on the way home, everyone travels on the same lines, which creates crowding. At the same time, the Transportation Ministry added 31 buses to these lines to ease the crowding.

The problems about which the residents are complaining are not within the ministry's jurisdiction, the statement continued. "First, the crowding is caused by giving permits in ever-growing numbers, which mandates finding solutions for the workers. The transportation minister warned about this matter in the cabinet meeting and demanded that the responsible parties deal with it. Second, the issue of the residents traveling jointly [with Palestinians] is the responsibility of the Defense Ministry."

Hotovely said her area of responsibility was the war on traffic accidents, not public transport. However, she added, she has urged ministry officials responsible for public transport to find solutions to the problem, and the ministry did recently add another 30 buses on the line that serves Ariel.