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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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SEPARATION THREATENS TO UNDERMINE SETTLEMENTS

From Settlement Report, July–August 2002.

The continuing Palestinian intifada against Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip has sparked the most significant reassessment of the role and value of settlements since June 1967. Palestinian attacks in Israel as well as on settlers and settlements are forcing unprecedented changes in Israeli perceptions of the settlement enterprise. They are also altering perspectives on the relationship between settlements and Israeli security as understood by policymakers and the public. It is still too early to conclude how or whether the settlement enterprise will adapt to the challenge posed by the intifada or be undermined by it.

The link between civilian settlement and Israeli security requirements was first forged in the early years of Israeli occupation. Leaders who believed in the necessity of remaining in military control of the area west of the Jordan River viewed the creation of Jewish settlements in the newly captured areas as a means of establishing domestic political support for their military strategy. Their approach promised to transform the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), at least in the eyes of the Israeli public, from an army occupying

foreign land—the West Bank and Gaza Strip—into an army protecting Israeli citizens—the growing numbers of settlers—in its homeland.

By the late 1970s the settlement lobby itself had emerged as a political power. Expanding the settlements no longer needed to be justified on security grounds. Indeed, to such partisans of settlement as Gush Emunim, “security” as understood by Israeli military officers was not even a consideration for those charged with realizing God's promise to the Jewish people.

During this period, even when expanding the civilian settlements proved on the tactical level to lack any security value, for the IDF there was really no price to be paid for settling anywhere in the West Bank or Gaza. The public, while largely disengaged from this enterprise, was nevertheless sympathetic to the patriotic imagery surrounding it. As more Israelis moved across the Green Line in search of “quality of life” and as long as Palestinians were quiescent, the average Israeli did not question the status quo.

In this triumphant atmosphere, even the demographic challenge posed by a seemingly unassailable Arab majority in the territories was dismissed. Minister of Agriculture Ariel Sharon's September 1977 plan, “A Vision of Israel at Century's End,” called for a

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settler population of 2 million by 2000. Ezer Weizman, before he became defense minister in 1976, explained that “the demographic problem will disappear the moment we unite all the territories with the State of Israel.”

Settlements and settlers were also not a major security burden during the first intifada, which erupted in December 1987 and ended with the bargain struck between Israel and the PLO at Oslo in 1993. Despite the unprecedented nature of Palestinian roadside attacks on settlers, the Palestinian arsenal during this uprising was limited to stones. The security of settlers, then far fewer in number than today, was more easily secured by the IDF, which found that settlements offered a useful and cost-efficient infrastructure to support its own expanded deployment. Throughout the intifada, the number of settlers and settlements continued to increase.

The Oslo period did not challenge the conventional wisdom regarding the security value of settlements. On the contrary, the map created from 1994 to 2000 reflected the continuing centrality of settlements to Israel’s political and security doctrine concerning the West Bank and Gaza Strip. During this period, the settler population of the West Bank and Gaza Strip doubled to 200,000, and not one settlement was evacuated. Sharon was not the only Israeli leader who understood that but for the settlements, the IDF presence in the occupied territories lacked a politically justifiable *raison d’être*, and Israel would have been compelled to withdraw completely.

A breach between settlements and security would open only following an Israeli redeployment from the more than 40 percent of the West Bank and 80 percent of Gaza nominally controlled by the Palestinian Authority (PA). As the Camp David talks convened in July 2000, Israeli public opinion, including major elements in the settler community, had become reconciled to the evacuation of some settlements in the context of an agreement with the PA. The maps presented by the government of Ehud Barak to the Palestinians from May to December 2000 (see Settlement Monitors in *JPS* 117 and 119) reflected the proposition, already apparent on the border with Egypt and in failed talks with Syria, that Israeli security could be enhanced by an agreement that necessarily included withdrawal from most of the territory captured in June 1967 and the evacuation of most settlements. The final status map presented by Israel at Taba (see Settlement

Monitor in *JPS* 120) also reflected the revolutionary notion not only that Israeli security control of the Jordan Valley could be ceded over time but that the presence of the IDF in the area could be rooted in an agreement with the Palestinians rather than in Jewish settlement. Both of these concepts, championed by Barak’s foreign minister Shlomo Ben Ami, were openly opposed by the IDF in January 2001.

The al-Aqsa intifada has emerged in the wake of the failure of the Oslo process as the driving force in Israeli-Palestinian relations. The phenomenon of suicide attacks against Israeli civilians in particular has done what Oslo failed to do—mobilize a ground swell of popular Israeli support for a physical “separation” from the Palestinians in the occupied territories that separation’s opponents cannot defer.

Construction of a security fence is proceeding approximately along a line suggested by Barak at Taba that included lands to be annexed to Israel as part of an agreement with the PLO. Today’s project, nominally part of Sharon’s grander vision of security zones (see Settlement Monitor in *JPS* 124), represents the imposition of a security concept by the public upon reluctant military and political officials who question its utility and cost effectiveness.

The prevailing popular perception that a security barrier can enhance Israeli security also has grave implications for settlements, which is why settlers are adamantly opposed to the concept, even as they are reconciled to its realization. It builds upon a notion first suggested at Oslo that the occupied territories are indeed a foreign country, not an integral part of the State of Israel.

“A fence is a fact on the ground. Like settlements. Only in the opposite direction,” wrote Uri Elitzur, a settlement leader, in *Yedi’ot Aharonot* on 14 June 2002. “A fence declares, through the means of facts on the ground: until this point is ours, and from there and beyond does not belong to us. Settlers aspire to use the imagery of creating facts on the ground. This fence is no image, a fact is being established, and facts on the ground are the thing that determines the future.”

Even as Prime Minister Sharon declares that the subject of evacuating settlements will not even be raised during his term, a continuing series of leaks from “senior military officials” suggests that the army lacks the manpower to adequately defend some settle-

ments and has advised that new outposts are a “headache” to defend and that some, particularly in Gaza, should be evacuated. One Israeli commentator has even joked that Israel needs a force as large as the Chinese army to defend the settlement outposts, a mission that undermines the IDF’s ability to perform other missions.

The IDF campaign conducted through the press reflects, in part, a warning to the government that the military is being asked to perform missions—the defense of settlers, settlements, and the newly emerging security perimeter—beyond its available resources. It also reflects a growing and public perception for the first time since 1967 that there are significant security costs to be borne by settlement expansion, and that these costs are not suffered by anonymous soldiers, but by brothers, fathers, and sons ordered with increasing frequency to perform what many consider to be thankless reserve duty in defense of settlements. In recent weeks, the IDF has reduced such tasks, leading to complaints by settlement leaders. According to Avitar Cohen, head of security at Ofra, “The army has failed in assuring the security of settlements because it doesn’t relate to this as a primary mission.”

Some proponents of separation anticipate that the construction of a security barrier will focus Palestinian attacks on settlers and settlements. In such a “war for the peace of the settlements,” popular pressure will grow for evacuation of the vast majority of settlements. Settlers are understandably concerned by such a scenario. Never in its history has the settlement movement had to confront an Israeli public mobilized in such opposition to its agenda.

Nevertheless, settlers and their political allies have demonstrated a single-minded ability for almost three decades to turn circumstances to their advantage. A post-Oslo era superintended by Ariel Sharon is an unlikely setting for the settlements’ demise.

“A SETTLER STAKES CLAIM FOR HIMSELF, FOR ISRAEL”

The following article by Peter Hermann was published by the Baltimore Sun on 22 May 2002.

Ever since he watched American Westerns on television three decades ago, Shlomo Mor knew he wanted a ranch. He dreamed of having a flock of sheep. Open vistas. Room to roam.

He has that now atop a hill he calls Mor Mountain. Until last week, he and a son were the only people on a 1,000-acre farm where they tend 105 sheep, 10 dogs, and 2 goats.

Mor Mountain, among the newest Jewish settlements in the West Bank, illustrates how they come to be and how they evolve into permanent communities.

Last week, the Israeli army assigned four soldiers to guard the two residents. The World Zionist Organization, an umbrella organization for Zionist philanthropy and development, paid for the paving of a one-lane, two-mile access road, in effect the Mors’ driveway.

For the rightist government of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, the farm is another foothold in the West Bank, territory at the heart of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. It is land that many Israelis believe God promised to the Jews and that Palestinians no less firmly believe is a necessary part of a future Palestinian state.

Sharon has vowed never to dismantle a settlement; Palestinians vow that there can be no true peace until most of the settlements are gone.

For Mor and the Israeli government, the situation on the hilltop could not be better. Mor gets to gaze out over land leased for a nominal fee from the government, and Israeli authorities have found a way to populate—Palestinians would say steal—another sliver of the West Bank.

Mor knows the government is using him to further its political aim of controlling as much of the West Bank as possible through the creation and expansion of Jewish settlements.

“I know why I’m here,” he said, sipping instant coffee in his trailer. “Israel wants to make sure this land remains in Israeli hands. I’m protecting their back. I came here on my own free will, so I can’t complain.”

He arrived on 7 March 1999, to live amid a landscape composed mostly of rocks and scrub. He planned to raise goats and sell their milk to Bedouin tribes and Palestinian villages. But the Palestinian uprising that began in September 2000 ended friendly contacts between settlers and villagers.

Mor replaced most of his goats with sheep and intended to sell them for meat. A year and a half later, he is beginning to breed them. His work now consists of little more than feeding his flock, which takes only a couple of hours each day. He spends

the rest of his time planting trees and keeping watch—for thieves or potential attackers.

Mor knows that the soldiers sent to stand at the four corners of his ranch are really there to expand the Israeli military's hold on the area and that his presence is a perfect excuse to justify their patrols.

Soldiers guard settlements throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but Mor Mountain, given its tiny population, underscores the burden the settlements impose on the Israeli army and the vast resources devoted to protecting them from their Palestinian neighbors. The soldiers guarding the Mors are reservists, forced to leave their jobs and family under emergency call-up orders originally put into effect to fight Palestinian militants in Gaza.

Some Israeli lawmakers call the deployment at Mor Mountain an insult to the army. "The very fact that reserve soldiers are sent to guard isolated farms like that is scandalous," Anat Maor of the left-wing Meretz Party told parliament.

Dror Etkes of the group Peace Now says there are at least 30 outposts like Mor's farm, and others with empty trailers waiting for settlers to arrive. "The idea is to settle as much of the land as possible to avoid the possibility of establishing a Palestinian state," Etkes said. "Once there are people there, it is much easier [for the government] to say they can stay. If you are going to argue that God promised people this land, then people have to live there."

Leaders of the settler movement say the Israeli government is not doing enough to aid their cause. Outposts such as Mor Mountain don't mean much, says Ezra Rosenfeld, a spokesman for the YESHA settlers' council. "If you got two guys living in five trailers this year, and you go back next year, maybe you got five guys living in 10 trailers," he said. "More often than not, unfortunately, you won't find anything."

If the government wants to populate isolated areas such as Mor Mountain, Rosenfeld says, it is obligated to protect them. "It would be easier, I admit, if everyone lived in one town with a big wall," he said. "But that is not the reality. In order to populate the land, we need so-called crazies to go out to hills and inhabit them. The cost is inefficient use of soldiers."

Settlements have been a contentious issue since the first one, Kefar Etzion, was established south of Bethlehem almost immediately after Israel's capture of the West Bank

and Gaza Strip in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. But building began in earnest after the right-wing Likud Party came to power in 1977.

By 1980, the number of Jewish settlements had grown to 53, with 12,000 residents. In 1990, 78,000 settlers occupied 106 settlements. In 2000, nearly 200,000 lived in 123 settlements.

Sharon was one of the expansion program's main architects, first as agriculture minister from 1977 to 1981, giving him the power to expropriate land, then as minister of housing and construction from 1990 to 1992, with authority to build.

The interim peace accords reached in Oslo, Norway, in 1993 called upon Israel and the Palestinians to maintain the status quo in the West Bank and Gaza Strip until a final peace agreement. Israel pledged not to build new settlements or expand old ones, but said it retained the right to "natural growth" within settlements' existing borders.

By whatever name it chooses to call it, Palestinians say, Israel has steadily seized control of more of their land.

GRASPING FOR CONTROL

Peace Now and other groups say that Sharon's government has created 34 West Bank settlements since he became prime minister 15 months ago.

A report released last week by the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem [see Settlement Monitor in *JPS* 124] noted that settlers inhabit only 1.7 percent of the West Bank but effectively control 42 percent of the land. Municipal boundaries are much larger than the actual living area, and regional councils have been awarded control of vast tracts, often without Palestinians being informed.

That is the story of Mor's hilltop farm. His trailer and sheep pen occupy only a small plot, but his lease covers the rugged area between two larger settlements, Tene and Shima, and stretches to the Palestinian town of Dahariyya, home to about 60,000 people under Palestinian Authority control.

His farm is along Highway 60, a winding road following an ancient trade route through the heart of the West Bank, a route Palestinians are now forbidden to use. The highway, and a parallel dry riverbed, are nicknamed "the way of the thieves." Mor says he is happy to act as a buffer between Dahariyya, the neighboring settlements, and the Israeli city of Beersheba.

Visitors to Mor's Mountain drive to the well-guarded settlement of Tene, population

700, then head northeast on a roller-coaster road to a fence topped with barbed wire and floodlights. A pack of dogs, including Mor's Great Dane, greets every visitor. While he disdains outsiders, Mor is relaxed. . . .

Inside the sparsely furnished trailer, an M-16 assault rifle leans against a wall near a cluttered kitchen table. A generator supplies electricity. Mor keeps binoculars on a pole in his yard so he can survey the hills and patrols at night with night-vision goggles and a dune buggy.

"I don't need soldiers to guard me," said Mor, after four of them shook his hand before a shift change. They are not real soldiers, he says, but air force personnel usually assigned to guard munitions dumps and barracks.

"If something happened, I would have to go out and shoot," said Mor, pointing to his rifle. He and his son Aviad, 23, rotate guard duty every night. Aviad sleeps on the couch, his clothes and shoes on, ready to jump at the first sound.

"A VERY HIGH PRICE"

Still, Mor says he has no regrets. He remembers the move from his comfortable three-story home in Beersheba.

"I had dreamed for 30 years to own a farm," he said, sitting on a leather couch. "I dreamt it ever since watching cowboy movies. I came here to be alone and for the clean air. I can see people where I want and when I want." . . .

Shlomo Mor is a practical man. He has no grand illusions of holding onto this land at all costs, and as a career military officer he understands that the politics that enabled him to realize his dream might in the end force him to give it up.

"I understand that to make peace, the Palestinians have to have a land to live on," Mor said. "It might be this land."

"That is a very high price for me," he said. "But if my government comes and says it is the only way to make peace, then I will leave."

SETTLER ATTITUDES TOWARD WITHDRAWAL FROM THE TERRITORIES

Following are the summary results of a study of 3,200 households in 127 settlements conducted by Peace Now in July 2002, as provided by Peace Now's Washington office. The full study is available in Hebrew via the Peace Now Web site at www.peacenow.org.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

Response to a Withdrawal Decision

More than two-thirds (68%) of the settlers recognize the authority of the democratic institutions of the country (Knesset, government, Jewish majority in the Knesset and/or a referendum) to decide on withdrawal from the settlements and will conform to such a decision. Approximately a quarter (26%) will obey such a decision to withdraw following a struggle against it by legal means. A small minority (6%) declare that they will struggle against such a decision even with illegal means, including endangering themselves or their families. Only approximately one-third of this minority, namely 2% of the total, may be identified as "extremist" according to all the parameters of the study. Thus, only 2% of settlers are willing to use force of arms against withdrawal.

Preferred Solution in Case of Withdrawal Decision

If a decision is taken for withdrawal, 59% consider suitable financial compensation as the best solution. Ten percent would prefer to move to a community inside the Green Line. Twenty-three percent would prefer moving as a community to another settlement in the territories. Only 9% would refuse any solution.

Readiness to accept financial compensation is highest among the settlers who define themselves as secular or traditional. Those who define themselves as ultra-orthodox are moderately willing. Those most unwilling in this matter, as with other parameters, are those who define themselves as national-religious. The most extreme group is to be found in the small settlements near the large Palestinian cities. In the areas designated for "settlement blocs" (according to plans published in the past, such as the Beilin-Abu Mazin or Barak plans), the willingness to withdraw in exchange for financial compensation is high. These settlers would also obey the decisions of democratic institutions.

Main Reason for Living in a Settlement

- 77% choose to live in a settlement primarily for reasons of "quality of life."
- 20% are there mainly for religious reasons.
- Only 3% choose to live in a settlement primarily because they believe that the settlements provide national security.

Political Positions

- 86% of the settlers characterize themselves as right wing. (In the control group of Jewish citizens living within the Green Line, 63% characterized themselves as right wing.)
- Approximately 40% of the settlers characterize themselves as national-religious.

Need to Reach a Peace Agreement with the Palestinians

An absolute majority (55%) of the settlers agree in principle that there should be an effort to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians. Within the Green Line, among Jewish citizens, 69% agree.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The overwhelming majority of the settlers express pragmatic and realistic positions regarding withdrawal and financial compensation. If a decision is made for withdrawal, a clear majority of settlers is prepared to accept a withdrawal from the settlements in exchange for suitable financial compensation. The position presented by the Council of Settlers and by the parties of the Right is not

the position of most of the settlers but rather their own (minority) political position. The attitude of most of the settlers will not constitute an obstacle to the achievement of an agreement, including withdrawal from the settlements. The settlers, with the exception of a very small extremist minority, will not be an obstacle to a peace agreement.

2. The government of Israel is collaborating with the ostensible representatives of the settlers, the settler leaders, and ignoring the wishes and beliefs of the majority of the settlers. The failure of the government to relate to the willingness of the settlers to withdraw borders on contempt for human life. The government is holding the vast majority of the settlers hostage to the policy preferences of this government.

3. There is no basis whatsoever to the call to strengthen "settlement blocs" or the relocation of settlers to such blocs in the case of withdrawal. Most of the settlers do not want to relocate to other settlements, and the settlers in areas of these blocs are the very ones most willing to have compensation in exchange for withdrawal.



Journalists tour a section of Israel's new security fence paralleling the Green Line near Qalqilya, 25 June 2002. (AFP Photo/Sven Nackstrand)