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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 have been written by Geoffrey Aronson 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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LIVING WITHOUT A SOLUTION: FORTY YEARS OF OCCUPATION AND SETTLEMENT

From Settlement Report, May-June 2007.

The fortieth anniversary of Israel's occupation of the territories conquered in June 1967 is an opportunity for reflection and taking stock. The Jewish state has ruled the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights for forty of the almost sixty years of its modern existence. Occupation long ago became the rule, rather than the exception, of Israel's short, tumultuous history. Israelis, Palestinians, and Syrians who have raised three generations since June 1967, and who believe that Israel's settlement policies—the key to Israel's commanding presence in these territories—are wrong, and must end, face a difficult and unequal battle. An accident of history may have placed Israel in control of these territories and the destiny of those residing there, but the many years

since that fateful June have produced a new chapter in the confrontation between Arab and Jew.

After four decades, the occupation has a history of its own. Indeed the occupation is history—a dynamic confrontation between Israel and Palestine; an ever-evolving contest among Palestinians between the forces of nationalism and those of return; and the story of the debate within Israel, first and foremost over the destiny of Zionism and the Jewish people, but also over the fate of Palestine and its people as well.

The players in this fateful drama are not fixed, and the story is not predetermined. But an understanding of the present and a sober appreciation of the prospects for the future is best served by recognizing the interactions of contending, often unequal forces—Israel's Defense Forces (IDF), the settlement movement, its opponents, the Palestinian political elite and public, and the international community—during these last decades.

Settlement as History—The Past as Future

The story of the settlement of Sebastia/Elon Moreh near Nablus in 1976 should be recalled when considering the recent, similar campaign by settlers to resettle Homesh, evacuated in 2005 as part of Israel's disengagement plan from the northern West Bank. The declarations and remonstrations of Israel's leadership when settlers squatted in Hebron in 1979 also offer an instructive perspective on the effectiveness of official opposition to the wildcat appearance in March 2007 of some of the very same squatters, or their children, in an unfinished building site some few hundred meters distant from the 1979 incident. The practical significance of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's rhetorical and diplomatic commitments to evacuate new settlement "outposts" confronts an entrenched, decades-long effort to "grab and settle." The transition over the decades of some settlements such as Ma'ale Adumim and Shilo, one begun as an "illegal" outpost, the other as an "archeological dig," offers important insights into the future of contemporary settlement outposts at Migron and Amona. Israel's use of legalisms as an instrument to consolidate settlement and deprive Palestinians of land and property—the essential building blocs of sovereignty and independence—is as old as the occupation itself. In short, when looking to the future of Israel's occupation, first look to the past.

To Grab and To Settle—Then and Now

In June 1977, there were 10,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank apart from East Jerusalem, almost one half of them residing in Kiryat Arba near Hebron. A new Likud government, the first in Israel's history, had recently assumed power. Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, the architect of Israel's intention to remain forever in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, spoke at a Tel Aviv conference commemorating ten years of Israeli rule in what were then referred to as the "administered territories." Dayan warned that there was no territorial solution for the occupied rump of Palestine—the West Bank.

"We are living in peace. There is less violence in the territories than in Tel Aviv. Ten years of negotiations with Jordan, including direct negotiations, went nowhere. Why? Because there wasn't a territorial line dividing the West Bank acceptable to the parties. The Allon Plan makes no sense to the Arabs!

The question is not, 'What is the solution?' but 'How do we live without a solution.'

Living without a solution, then as now, was understood by Israel as the key to maximizing the benefits of conquest while minimizing the burdens and dangers of retreat or formal annexation. This commitment to the status quo, however, disguised a program of expansion that generations of Israeli leaders supported as enabling, through Israeli settlement, the dynamic transformation of the territories and the expansion of effective Israeli sovereignty to the Jordan River.

Anwar Nusseibeh, a Jerusalemite and former Jordanian defense minister, criticized Dayan's support for the status quo. "Mutual recognition" by a process of "compromise and consensus" was "the first step in the process of conciliation." Israel's policy of "creating facts," he charged, "implied a policy of dictating terms." He saw Israeli policy as "an attempt to empty the West Bank of its political content before emptying it of Arabs. How can Israel preserve its demographic majority and its security?" he asked. "How can it maintain the occupation and accomplish all this within a democracy?"

The newly elected prime minister, Menachem Begin, was not alone among Israel's leaders in remaining deaf to such concerns, especially when they were expressed by Palestinians. Begin proclaimed the centrality of settlement—anywhere and everywhere the IDF ruled. Foremost among Begin's settlement priorities was the "illegal" settlement of Sebastia/Elon Moreh (today renamed Keddumim) near Nablus. Settlers belonging to the newly formed Bloc of the Faithful—Gush Emmunim—had been rebuffed by the IDF in numerous attempts to settle the site permanently before they managed to win agreement to remain. Their effort enjoyed the support of then-defense minister Shimon Peres. Despite the opposition of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, settlers continued to squat at the encampment. They were there when Rabin was defeated in May 1977, inaugurating a decade of intensive settlement and land confiscation.

Within days of his startling election, Begin journeyed to Elon Moreh to give his blessing to the settlement. "Since May of this year," he thundered, "the name of these areas has been changed from occupied to liberated territories. This is liberated Israeli land, and we call on young volunteers in the country and the diaspora to come and settle here." One day after his return from Washington, Begin's cabinet sanctioned the renegade

outposts of Elon Moreh, Ofra, and Ma'ale Adumim.

"The mission of Gush Emmunim now," declared one of its leaders, "is to grab and settle." In 1996 Ariel Sharon, using these exact words, urged the children of Gush Emmunim to emulate their parents. Since then, the heirs of Gush Emmunim, as always with official connivance, have established more than one hundred of these "unauthorized outposts."

Today, the continuing diplomatic vacuum, the weakness of the government of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and the end of its sponsorship of the ambiguous convergence idea, and the perceived failure of disengagement, have removed from Israel's agenda evacuation of even those outposts that the Sharon and Olmert governments recognize as illegal and which they promised (the United States) to evacuate. Olmert has linked Israeli action on today's outposts—the modern-day Shilos, Sebastias, Ofras, and Ma'ale Adumim—to "part of a process in which the Palestinians fulfill their commitments." As *Ha'Aretz's* Aluf Benn and Yossi Verter noted, "Olmert has changed the policy of his predecessor, who demanded that the outpost issue be addressed separately from the dialogue with the Palestinians, and who represented the evacuation of outposts as a personal promise by him to the president of the United States. Olmert prefers to link the evacuation of outposts to the Palestinians' fight against terror. From this it is possible to understand that the settlers will remain on the ground for a long time to come."

Homesh First

Pro-settlement forces waged a defensive, internally divisive, and unsuccessful campaign against Israel's evacuation of the Gaza Strip in 2005. In February 2006, they failed to prevent the destruction of a few permanent dwellings in the Amona settlement next to Ofra. Now they are on the offensive, aiming to take command of the settlement agenda and to bury the idea of withdrawal from the West Bank.

The resettlement of Homesh, which in September 2005 was evacuated along with three other small settlements in the northern West Bank, is in the forefront of this effort to recapture "the spirit of Sebastia."

"The settlers who moved into the house in Hebron and those who plan to march on Homesh today," wrote Elyakim Ha'etzni, a veteran of the settlement movement, "are

seeking to correct the mistaken belief that the Israeli regime can survive the expulsion of 300,000 people as easily as it survived the expulsion of 8,000. . . . We must go back to the first grade of pioneering Zionism, on which all of this was built."

Organizers from the five extraparliamentary groups leading the serial campaign to return settlers to Homesh have made no effort to conceal their intent "to repair the mistake of disengagement in the spirit of Sebastia." Their effort, like the one decades ago at Sebastia and at countless other locations since, has been nothing if not methodical. On 18 December 2006, a dozen settlers who had been evacuated from the Homesh settlement in September 2005 returned to the site for Hanukkah. In March 2007, the IDF and police, after initially noting their opposition and invoking the law prohibiting Israeli civilian access to their area, took no action to prevent settlers from reaching the area. When settlers announced that they planned to reoccupy the site permanently, Minister of Defense Amir Peretz himself declared that, "there will be no taking over any part of the Homesh area. This must be clear." Olmert, however, benignly described the event as a "visit," notwithstanding the fact that organizers made no secret of the existence of "a nucleus of 30 families who intend to live there." A "security understanding" between Peretz, the IDF, and the settlers established "rules of the game" that enabled 3,000 to march to the settlement with enough generators, tents, water, and food to enable hundreds to stay for the next two nights before the more than 1,000 police and soldiers ordered to protect them put those resisting passively on buses. On 20 April, the IDF approved another march to the site, this time on the day of Israel's independence. "The Israeli public knows who is harming the state and who is trying to save it," declared Boaz Ha'etzni, son of Elyakim Ha'etzni and a principal organizer of the Homesh campaign.

"Hebron Is Ours—Arabs Out!"

If the campaign to resettle Homesh is meant to evoke the "golden era" of pioneering settlement, the battle over property in Hebron betrays a grimmer reality. Only 500 Israelis live in Hebron. Most of them are young children and teenagers, many the offspring of what even Prime Minister Begin described at the time as the "invaders" of 1979. Yet this small vanguard has, during the last 40 years, transformed the look and life of the city. Their intent had always been to

make life in the city unbearable for its Arab residents, and to transform Hebron, revered as site of the tomb of Abraham and, until a massacre by Palestinians in 1929, home to a small Jewish community, into a Jewish city. Hebron is the ugly, fanatical, and hateful face of Israel's settlement enterprise, and those settlers who rule it make no apologies for their dominion.

Recent video recordings have captured the complicity of the IDF in this ongoing campaign. One video, according to a 3 March report on YNet, "reportedly shows girls from Hebron pelting eggs at Palestinians in the presence of an IDF soldier and Border Police officers who make no move to stop them." Another dramatic video, now posted on YouTube, shows a young woman, Ifat Elkobi, taunting a young member of the Abu Aisha family ("You are a whore," she says repeatedly) who lives in what can only be called a cage, built around her house to protect the family from settlers.

On 19 March 2007, settlers, fearing that Palestinians would soon preempt them, moved into an unfinished multistory building strategically located on a road linking the Kiryat Arba settlement to the settlement in the city center. Although it lacked windows, plumbing, interior walls, and electricity, 30 families and 14 individuals moved into the 3,500 km² structure that settlers christened Bet HaShalom, originally constructed by Palestinians as a commercial mall.

The IDF, which is tasked with insuring the "normal life" of settlers, refused to oppose the operation on security grounds. The attorney general announced that no action should be taken until an examination of the settlers' ownership claims.

Expressions of political support for the operation were not long in coming. "If the building in Hebron was acquired legally," Olmert is reported to have said, "I won't let [Defense Minister] Peretz evacuate it." Others were more emphatic. The *Jerusalem Post* reported suggestions that "the prime minister would prefer to stall on the issue until after the May 28 Labor primary when he is expected to have an easier defense minister with whom to work." Olmert's liaison to the settlers, Otniel Schneller, himself a settler, visited the building within hours of the settlers' arrival to lend his support. "In my understanding, this is part of Kadima's worldview."

Settlers, not for the first time in their efforts to seize real estate in the city, claim to have purchased the property for \$700,000. A

Palestinian owner disputes this, but settlers do not contest the fact that their entry was not sanctioned as required by Israel. On 5 April, Peretz ordered the IDF to evacuate the settlers from the building, but no date was specified. Deputy Defense Minister Efraim Sneh said that the order would be carried out within days. As of the time of publication of this report [June 2007—*Ed.*], the settlers have resided in the building for more than a month, complicating the complex legal and bureaucratic effort to remove them.

Yehuda Litani, a veteran Israeli journalist and a pioneer in reporting about Israeli policy in the territories, wrote that "only the defense minister has the right to approve the purchase—while he has not yet approved it, he hasn't taken any measures against the settlers, who broke into the building in a military-style operation. Amir Peretz is scared to upset the settlers, as were his predecessors from Moshe Dayan to Shaul Mofaz. Security forces are announcing that the settlers will not be removed until examination of the ownership documents. There's time in Hebron; the wheels of justice turn very slowly, if at all."

EXPANSION: EAST JERUSALEM AND BEYOND

A NEW ERA OF SETTLEMENT EXPANSION IN JERUSALEM AND ENVIRONS

From Settlement Report, March–April 2007.

Israel is stepping up its effort to enclose Jerusalem with a ring of barriers and settlements designed to sever Palestinian East Jerusalem from the West Bank. Recent announcements of significant settlement expansion in the areas in and around Neve Ya'acov and the former site of the airport at Atarot signify a major push by Israel to link East Jerusalem area settlements on both sides of the separation barrier, to establish an unbroken belt of settlement along East Jerusalem's northern perimeter, and perhaps of most significance, to tie Road 60 settlements—from Ma'ale Adumim north to Shilo and Eli—to the Tel Aviv metropolis and the coastal plain.

Within the next two months, ground may be broken for a just-approved project of 1,200 units—accommodating a population of 7,000—on land under the jurisdiction of the West Bank settlement of Giva Benjamin/Adam. The planned expansion is located west of the separation wall, while the

settlement itself sits to its east. No plan exists to connect the two areas across the wall. Rather, the new development will be linked with the East Jerusalem settlement of Neve Ya'acov.

In addition, a new settlement of 11,000 to 13,000 units—enough to house more than 60,000 people—is in the initial planning stages for the site of the shuttered Atarot airport, abutting the separation barrier and the Qalandia checkpoint. The idea has yet to be vetted by all relevant planning authorities, so construction is not imminent. If approved, however, the project will be the largest settlement undertaking in East Jerusalem since June 1967.

Like the nearby West Bank settlement of Kochav Ya'acov, east of the barrier, the Atarot settlement would be aimed at the exploding population of large ultra-Orthodox families in search of affordable housing. Settlements that target this market are already among the largest and fastest growing communities in the West Bank. A tunnel linking Road 443—a main artery west to the coastal plain—and Route 60—the main West Bank settlement artery—is a key element of the Atarot plan, providing settlers residing east of the separation wall fast transport to the Israeli coast. Completion of this connection would further signify Israel's intention to remain permanently in settlements in the heart of the West Bank.

Kochav Ya'acov, also known as Tel Zion, is an exploding community closing in on the Palestinian area of Kafr Aqab just to its west. Only a few hundred meters separate the outermost houses of the two locales. Kafr Aqab, although part of annexed East Jerusalem, is on the "Palestinian" side of the separation barrier, requiring residents to pass through checkpoints in order to gain entry to the city center. Multistory apartment buildings, almost all constructed without municipal permits, choke the once quiet village. The municipality has constructed new schools and health services, in part to maintain a continuing presence in the area despite Kafr Aqab's physical separation from the city.

Kafr Aqab residents hope that the new road connecting the yet-to-be approved Atarot settlement to Kochav Ya'acov and Route 60 will include an access road for the village, mitigating the impact of their location north of the separation wall and linking them once again with Jerusalem via a road network that Israel is unlikely to surrender in any political arrangement, thereby assur-

ing their now threatened status as residents of the city.

COMMITTEE APPROVES CONSTRUCTION OF THREE NEW JEWISH NEIGHBORHOODS IN EAST JERUSALEM

This article by Meron Rapoport originally appeared in Ha'Aretz on 10 May 2007.

Jerusalem's Planning and Construction Committee has approved a plan to build three new Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. According to the committee's chairman, Deputy Mayor Yehoshua Pollak, the plan is intended to create continuity between Jerusalem and the Etzion settlement bloc south of the city, and between Jerusalem and the Beit El area settlements north of the city.

The decision states that due to the National Planning and Construction Committee's decision to reject the Safdie Plan for expanding Jerusalem westward, "the committee sees fit to announce its intention to change the district outline plan in order to allow construction in additional areas of the city: Walaja, Givat Alona, the Atarot airport area, and more."

The Walaja area is in southwestern Jerusalem and consists primarily of territory annexed from the West Bank following the Six Day War. Construction in Walaja would create continuity between the Gilo and Malha neighborhoods of the capital and Beitar Ilit and the Etzion Bloc. Some of the land in the area is owned by Jewish entrepreneurs, some is defined as state land, and some is defined as being in absentee ownership.

Pollak told *Ha'Aretz* that up to 10,000 housing units can be built in the area. "If you strengthen Walaja, you strengthen the connection with the Etzion Bloc through the tunnel road," said Pollak. Government sources said the proposed neighborhood will in all likelihood be ultra-Orthodox, as the Jewish landowners in the area have already contacted ultra-Orthodox organizations.

The Jerusalem committee's decision will be sent to the planning authority that approves the Jerusalem outline plan for further examination. The authorization process is a long one, as in addition to the local committee and the district planning and construction committee's approval, the plan must also be approved by the National Planning and Construction Committee because some of the areas are not currently designated for construction.

A government source said the plan is problematic, and not just from a political standpoint, because it would prevent the construction of a Jerusalem airport on the one hand, and create an ultra-Orthodox bloc in the southern part of the city on the other. The ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods are currently concentrated in the northern part of the city.

ILLEGAL CONSTRUCTION APPROVED IN THE MOD'IN ILIT SETTLEMENT

This B'Tselem report was published on 28 February 2007.

In January, the Civil Administration's Supreme Planning Council approved the amended outline plan for the new neighborhood in the Mod'in Ilit settlement, which is located west of Ramallah. The plan for the neighborhood, called Matityahu East, took effect on 23 February and retroactively "rendered fit" thirty-nine buildings, containing hundreds of new housing units, that were built in violation of the relevant planning and housing laws. Twenty-two of these thirty-nine buildings were built, according to the Civil Administration and the State Attorney's Office, pursuant to building permits that the Mod'in Ilit local council issued illegally. The other seventeen buildings were built by construction companies that did not have building permits. Most of the apartments have been sold to Israelis and some are occupied.

The neighborhood lies completely on land belonging to the Palestinian village of Bil'in, which lies to its east. In the early 1990s, most of the land was declared "state land." Village residents appealed the declaration to the Civil Administration's Appeals Committee, contending that the land was privately owned. The Appeals Committee held, in July 1992, that a number of the land parcels covered by the declaration orders were under cultivation and, therefore, could not properly be considered state land.

In the framework of a petition filed by Peace Now in 2006 against the illegal construction in the settlement, it was learned that, contrary to the Appeals Committee's decision, those approximately 170 dunams [approximately 42 acres], recognized by the Appeals Committee as private land, were in fact registered as state land. The recently approved plan for the construction of hundreds of housing units involves this land. The state argues that including this land in the framework of the plan for Matityahu East was proper: following the Appeals Commit-

tee decision in July, 1992, the committee, at the request of the state prosecutor, corrected an alleged "scribe's error" as a result of which those 170 dunams were acknowledged to be state land. In addition to the impudence in relating to such a significant decision as "correcting a scribe's error," it was subsequently learned that the Appeals Committee cancelled its earlier decision without carrying out a hearing and without even notifying the Palestinian landowners or their attorneys.

In February 2005, the government approved the amended route of the separation barrier in the area of Mod'in Ilit, and construction of this section has been almost totally completed. The barrier separates Bil'in from most of its residents' farmland lying west of the village. This farmland includes, in addition to the land on which "Matityahu East" is built, hundreds of dunams that are now under cultivation. The state does not dispute that this additional land is privately owned by residents of Bil'in.

Research conducted by B'Tselem and Bimkom in December 2005 revealed that, in 1998, the housing ministry and the Civil Administration prepared a "master plan" for the area of Mod'in Ilit. This plan attached to "Matityahu East" 600 dunams [approximately 148 acres] of privately-owned Palestinian land, which now lies between the settlement and the barrier, on which more than 1,000 housing units are planned. This plan has no official status, but clearly expresses the Israeli authorities' intention to continue their land grab.

THE MILITARY IN HEBRON

GHOST TOWN: ISRAEL'S SEPARATION POLICY AND FORCED EVICTION OF PALESTINIANS FROM THE CENTER OF HEBRON (EXCERPTS)

Below are excerpts from the second chapter of the report on Hebron by B'Tselem and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel. The full report, issued 14 May 2007, is available at www.btselem.org.

Palestinians Leave the City Center

Over the years, many Palestinians have been forced to leave the [Hebron] city center for locations farther away from the settlement points. Also, many merchants have been compelled to close their shops near the settlements.

The city center was once a commercial district, serving not only Hebron's residents and merchants but merchants from the

entire southern West Bank. This commercial district has all but disappeared: Most of the shops are closed, and Palestinian commercial activity has moved elsewhere, away from the area of the settlements.

In November and December 2006, in preparation for this report, a survey was conducted of over one thousand structures in the area encompassing the neighborhoods in or next to which settlements have been established, and in the areas adjacent to the roads used by the settlers and the Israeli security forces. Most of the structures lie in H-2.*

Number of Palestinians who left the area

The survey's findings show that at least 1,014 Palestinian housing units had been vacated by their occupants. This number represents 41.9 percent of the housing units in the relevant area. Sixty-five percent (659) of the empty apartments became vacant during the course of the second intifada.

Regarding Palestinian businesses, 1,829 were not open for business. This number represents 76.6 percent of all the business establishments in the surveyed area. Of the closed businesses, 62.4 percent (1,141) were closed during the second intifada. At least 440 of them closed pursuant to military orders.

In practice, the number of apartments left by Palestinians is higher than the survey's figures. The collapse of Palestinian neighborhoods near the settlements led to a dramatic decline in the housing and living costs in these areas. Many poor families from distant parts of Hebron who did not have the money to pay rent moved into the Old City or other neighborhoods near the settlement points in the city. Since poorer families moved into houses that had been vacated, the survey's findings reflect a more limited abandonment of the area than actually occurred.

Analysis of the survey's findings indicates that, in at least some of the cases, more Palestinians left areas in which or next to which settlement points had been established, while in neighborhoods farther away from the settlements, a smaller percentage of Palestinians left their homes and shops.

* The 1997 Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron divided the city in two zones, H-1 and H-2. H-1 is under Palestinian Authority supervision, while H-2 is controlled by the Israeli army.

For example, thirty-two housing units are unoccupied on Old Shalala Street, in the section on which the Beit Hadasah settlement sits on one side and the Beit Romano settlement on the other side. These apartments comprise 74.5 percent of the apartments in this area; a large majority (twenty-three) of them was abandoned during the second intifada.

An even higher rate of abandonment occurred in the Bab al-Khan area, which is located north of al-Sahleh, between the Avraham Avino settlement and the Tomb of the Patriarchs, an area in which whole buildings became vacant. The Bab al-Khan area contains twenty-eight Palestinian apartments; twenty-four of them were abandoned during the second intifada, and three were vacated previously. One Palestinian family remains in the area. The area also contains forty-three shops: all were closed by army orders during the intifada. Not one shop remains open in the entire Bab al-Khan area.

In the al-Shuhada Street area, the heart of the city center—part of which was closed to Palestinian traffic and commerce as far back as 1994, following the massacre in the Tomb of the Patriarchs—there are 304 closed shops and warehouses (at least 218 of them were closed by military command) and a central bus station that Israel seized for use as an army base. Not one shop in the area is open for business.

Non-commercial entities that provided important services to the residents and were located in the commercial district moved, for reasons of operational efficiency, during the course of the intifada to areas less affected by the presence of settlers and Israeli security forces. The Ministry of Supply, the Ministry of Information, the Waqf, the Farmers Association, the Women's Association, and other such entities formerly operated in the markets area, in the Shuhada area, and in the Qasbah. In recent years, these institutions have moved farther away, most of them to H-1. During the second intifada, a few medical centers in this area also closed.

THE SPIRIT OF THE COMMANDER PREVAILS

This article by Meron Rapoport originally appeared in Ha'Aretz on 20 May 2007.

"There is a military policy that is causing the Arab population to leave the center of Hebron. It's a clear plan, it's a fact. Everything would be all right if they would say so openly, if our policy were to create Jewish contiguity in Hebron, and the government were to tell

the army to do so: We would go to elections over that. But that is not the policy of the State of Israel. The problem is that under military rule the spirit of the commander is stronger than anything else.”

Haggai Alon says these words in the context of his job. In his position as adviser to the defense minister on “fabric of life” issues, Alon visits Hebron with the army, with the Civil Administration, with whoever he has to. As part of his job he sits in on discussions with senior Israel Defense Forces officers, walks around in the area, meets with officers and is supposed to tell them what to do on behalf of his boss, the defense minister.

Here and there he succeeds, he says. The Jordan Valley Highway stopped being a highway for “Israelis only,” the work hours at the Qarni crossing were doubled, increasing the amount of goods that pass through—but the overall situation is depressing. The experience Alon has accumulated after a year in the job has taught him that the official policy of the Israeli government is one thing, and the actions of the army on the ground are another, sometimes the opposite. In a disturbing way it is reminiscent of the Winograd committee,[†] which revealed to us how the general staff held political discussions, whereas the cabinet discussed where to bomb. The cabinet and the army exchanged roles in Lebanon. According to Alon, the same is true of the West Bank.

Alon, 33, has become a thorn in the side of the defense establishment. When, of his own accord, the outgoing CEO of Central Command issued an order forbidding Israelis to give Palestinians rides in their cars, Alon set up a hue and cry and the order was finally rescinded. When he discovered that the IDF was trying to evade honoring a ruling of the High Court of Justice, he sent letters and caused a great deal of embarrassment in the system. When he reveals how army officers are trying to move the fence so it will accord with the map of settlements, he quarrels openly with very senior officers.

Alon, as one may guess, did not grow up in the defense establishment. He is a political person and he doesn’t hide it. He was born in Kibbutz Naan, a vestige of what was once called *Ahdut Ha’avoda* (the left-wing Zionist Labor party). He thinks the Jordan Valley

should be left in Israeli hands even in a final status agreement. Definitely not a classical leftist.

For years he has accompanied Amir Peretz, and shortly after Peretz was appointed defense minister, Alon was appointed his political adviser. Since the beginning of the year he has been working in the Defense Ministry as the adviser on “fabric of life” issues. He, a dyed-in-the-wool civilian, replaced Brigadier General (res.) Baruch Spiegel, formerly a senior officer in the Civil Administration.

“Fabric of life” has recently become a burning issue. Last week the World Bank, the United Nations organization considered to be friendliest to Israel, published a harsh report, which claimed that although Israel signed an agreement in 2005 to ease restrictions on movement in the territories, they have only become stricter [report published 9 May 2007—*Ed.*]. The report states that Israel prevents Palestinians access to about half the areas of the West Bank, and it claims that the restrictions on movement were designed to grant priority to the movement of the settlers and to help the expansion of the settlements at the expense of the Palestinian population.

The benchmarks document[‡] recently formulated by the Americans, which presented Israel with a timetable for dismantling roadblocks in the West Bank and for the opening of a safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza, aroused a great deal of anger in Israel. Some IDF officials claimed that the Americans were able to write the document only based on inside information from “factors in the defense establishment.” As though OCHA, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, doesn’t report regularly on the situation of the roadblocks in the territories, and as though the Americans have no way of knowing what is happening at Hawara checkpoint. Alon does not understand why they are upset by the American demands. The problem is not the demands, he says, but the question: “How did it happen that a year and a half after the disengagement, the Americans feel a need to give us a written document, something they haven’t done in a very long time.”

A defense source says the origins of this document lie in the fact that the Americans

[†] The Israeli committee charged with investigating the government and military’s actions in the July 2006 war with Lebanon; it is headed by retired Israeli judge Eiyahu Winograd.

[‡] An eight-month timeline for the implementation of the U.S.-developed Agreement on Movement and Access.

have stopped believing Israel because “they are presented with maps that are an outright lie.” Alon says that even though he works in the defense ministry and the data are supposed to be accessible to him, he has difficulty knowing the exact number of checkpoints. “The only thing that’s clear is that they have doubled since the disengagement.”

His job, he says, is to ensure that the official statements made by the Israeli government regarding its policy toward the Palestinians are in fact implemented, and that is not an easy job. He says the IDF is setting a route for the fence that will not enable the establishment of a Palestinian state and is allowing itself to evade High Court orders to change the route. He claims that the army “is carrying out an apartheid policy” that is emptying Hebron of Arabs, setting up roadblocks without anyone knowing where and how many, Judaizing the Jordan Valley, and cooperating openly and blatantly with the settlers.

Take, for example, Highway 317, which links several settlements in the south Hebron Hills. About a year ago, the IDF constructed a concrete barrier along the road, whose location is no coincidence. The barrier prevents Palestinians from reaching their lands on the other side of the road. According to the plan approved by Ariel Sharon about three years ago, the separation fence was supposed to run along Highway 317 and in effect annex the local settlements to Israel, together with hundreds of square kilometers of the southern West Bank between the highway and the Green Line. After it turned out that it would be impossible to defend this route in the courts, it was decided to change the route to coincide with the Green Line.

And now, miraculously, the concrete barrier that was constructed last year is exactly congruent with Sharon’s original route. About half a year ago the High Court ordered it dismantled, but the IDF was not impressed. For months it ignored the specific order, until the legal adviser of the Judea and Samaria division announced about a month and a half ago that the IDF has no intention of dismantling the barrier. This was a strange announcement, not only because it ostensibly contradicts a High Court order, but also because, according to Alon, no senior officials in the defense ministry were informed of the intention not to move the fence: not the defense minister and not even the ministry’s director general, who

is the official responsible for the fence. The Central Command decided to build the fence in the spirit of Sharon, and that’s that. Exactly, says Alon, the way it enthusiastically maintains what he calls the “malicious plan” to link Gush Etzion to Jerusalem, or to annex dozens of kilometers of desert in the area of Ma’ale Adumim—plans that if carried out will eliminate the possibility of establishing two states for two nations, as written in the government platform.

After discovering a few weeks ago that the IDF does not intend to dismantle the barrier, Alon sent a furious letter to the defense minister, in which he claimed that the army “is doing everything in its power to avoid obeying the High Court ruling.” He says that “what is amazing is that army officers say that the route of the fence should have passed there [along Highway 317—*M. R.*], because that is what Sharon wanted. They’re not embarrassed. They say: ‘The High Court told us to move the fence, so we moved it, and now we’re building a mini-fence [the barrier—*M. R.*].’ As they see it, there was a hitch, the High Court screwed them.

“Another example is the ‘hole’ in the fence in the area of the Trans-Samaria Highway. The route, which was approved a moment before the formation of the new government, includes ‘fingers’ around Ariel and Karnei Shomron, but at the moment this section is not being built, because the Americans are opposed to building a fence deep inside the West Bank. So meanwhile there is a gap.”

Alon coordinated the work of a team of former senior officials in the Central Command, the Civil Administration, and the Shin Bet security services, which has proposed a solution: The fence will be built along the Green Line, and “special security areas” will be built around the large settlements deep inside the area. The proposal will soon be submitted to the defense minister for discussion, but Alon is guessing that the army will prefer to leave the gap in place. “The entire conduct on this issue shows the extent to which the professional establishment has implemented a political policy, in a frightening manner.”

Proof of the fact that the gap is a security risk could be seen last Pesach [Passover], in his opinion, when a truck bearing a yellow license plate, loaded with explosives, arrived in Tel Aviv and returned to Qalqilya without being stopped on the way. How did that happen? “There is no checking of cars with yellow license plates on the Green Line,

because the settlers are unwilling to undergo a check," says Alon.

Alon has several current examples of the close relations between the army and the settlers: for example, the ascent to Homesh on Israel's Independence Day. The defense minister did not approve plan. Yet thousands of demonstrators celebrated the holiday on the hill near Nablus. "In Homesh there was open, blatant cooperation with the settlers," says Alon. "At first the army gave them permission to ascend. After the permission was revealed, they canceled it, and then, ostensibly by surprise, the settlers 'confused' the army and went up to Homesh with dozens of buses."

Something similar happened in Hebron. Alon has trouble believing that the army did not know of the intention of hundreds of settlers to enter the *beit bameriva* ("house of contention"). He says "when a system is calibrated in advance to allow such things to happen, they happen."

As an example he cites from a letter sent by the legal adviser of the Judea and Samaria division in reply to a request by the Council for Peace and Security to open the center of Hebron to Palestinian movement. "Does anyone think it is possible to protect the residents of the Jewish settlement in the neighborhoods of Jewish settlement when these neighborhoods are isolated from one another, and when they are divided by an area in which a Palestinian lifestyle is being conducted as a matter of routine? How is it possible to prevent an attack caused by friction in the aforesaid neighborhoods when regular Palestinian commercial life is being conducted right on their threshold?"

It may be an excellent reply, but neither Alon nor Minister Peretz nor any of his assistants have informed the Judea and Samaria division that there is a policy of separation in the center of Hebron. "There is no written order to empty Hebron of Arabs," says Alon, "but that's the greatness of military rule. It can simply refrain from doing: it can refrain from enforcing the law on the settlers and it can refrain from allowing the Palestinians to move around. In the entire story of violations of the law in the territories, the spirit of the commander is the determining factor. It is stronger than any law or procedure."

According to Alon, the spirit of the CEO of Central Command, Yair Naveh, who is about to retire, was clear. He was "a settler in the service of the settlers," he says, and should have been removed because of his statements against King Abdallah of Jordan

and because of IDF activity in Ramallah on the day when Prime Minister Ehud Olmert met with Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmud Abbas in Sharm al-Shaykh. But Naveh, says Alon, at least behaved decently. He did not conceal his opinions, yet he didn't refuse to obey an order the moment he received specific instructions from the political leadership. Other officers, he says, recall their moral difficulty on the issue of the roadblocks only when interviewed upon their discharge.

Alon is trying to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Awareness of the issue of the roadblocks has increased, and in some places, like the Jordan Valley, there has been an easing of restrictions. The program he coordinated to change the route of the fence will soon come up for discussion. New chief of staff Gabi Ashkenazi also raises his hopes. "Dan Halutz was a Sharon appointment, and that's how he behaved. Ashkenazi is responsible. He is the hope of the Jewish people for taking politics out of the army. He has already told the political leaders: 'Don't cover political decisions with a pretense of security. Decide, and we'll implement.' The actual policy of the IDF, especially in recent years, is creating profound changes that threaten to make it impossible to leave the West Bank. We cannot allow the executive ranks to get us stuck in an irreversible binational situation."

The IDF spokesman said in response regarding Homesh that "3,000 Israeli citizens came to Homesh, although it was forbidden to remain in the area without a permit. IDF forces operated according to IDF values in order to ensure the security of the civilians."

Regarding Highway 317, he said that "the Central Command did not try to prevent the implementation of the High Court decision, but examined it and decided on a model for implementation. Due to the reservations of Palestinian residents, the route proposed by the defense establishment is currently being examined."

SETTLERS LAUNCH FIRST DRIVE IN U.S. TO SELL HOMES

This article by Daphna Berman was first published in the "AngloFile" section of Ha'Aretz on 3 March 2007.

A campaign launched this week to convince American Jews to buy homes in the West Bank is the first organized sales effort of its kind, activists from both sides of the

political spectrum said. Amana, the settlement arm of Gush Emmunim, hosted housing fairs in New York and New Jersey this week and plans are underway for similar events in Miami and Chicago.

Never before have Diaspora Jews been asked to directly underwrite settlement expansion by either buying or financing the building of West Bank homes. But spurred by what they have termed a successful start, Amana has set its sights on Jewish communities throughout the United States, with hopes of expanding the new and somewhat surprising trend.

About eight homes in settlements, including Kiryat Arba and Karnei Shomron, were sold this week, and dozens of American buyers are "seriously considering" purchasing in the coming weeks, representatives of Amana told "AngloFile."

Ranging in price from \$93,000 to \$165,000, the homes are to be rented to settlers for \$250 to \$400 a month and are being marketed as a way to "leave your thumbprint on the destiny of Israel." The campaign essentially allows Israeli settlers, who will pay the American owners monthly rent, the opportunity to live in homes they would not have been able to afford to buy.

Potential buyers are told that the investment is "insured, protected, and 100 percent legal." Amana representatives tell concerned buyers that if settlements are dismantled as part of a final-status agreement with the Palestinians, they will be reimbursed for the cost of their homes.

Officials from the prime minister's office would not confirm Amana's promise regarding compensation and said in a statement: "We are not familiar with this issue and therefore will not comment."

Israeli law regarding compensation for people evacuated in the Gaza pullout includes certain provisions for homeowners who do not live in the area in question. Officials at Sela, the disengagement administration, noted that an "isolated group" of Gush Katif evacuees who were not Israeli citizens received compensation for their homes, but they would not provide further information, citing privacy concerns.

"It's an investment, but also a statement of ideology," said Alon Farbstein, an assistant executive director at Binyanei Bar Amana, the organization's construction company, who attended housing fairs in Teaneck, New Jersey, and Queens, New York, this week. "People from Israel often come and ask for

donations, but we're not asking for charity. We have come to offer them something and they are so appreciative."

The Union Bank of Israel, Bank Igud, is offering mortgages of up to 65 percent of the price of the home. A bank representative present at the fair offered an annual interest rate of 5 percent for 20 years, according to materials distributed there. Some buyers won't need a mortgage, Farbstein says, and those who do may take loans from U.S. banks instead. The Americans who already signed purchase contracts have made a down payment of \$3,000.

The support of the settlement movement among certain pockets of U.S. Jewry is hardly new. Americans have purchased homes in the West Bank in years past and rented them out to local residents. Organizations such as Ateret Cohanim have also asked American Jews to underwrite the purchase of homes in East Jerusalem through talks at parlor meetings or synagogues abroad.

But activists from Amana, as well as Peace Now and Gush Shalom on the Left, say that this is the first organized attempt to sell homes in the territories to Diaspora Jewry en masse. "Until now, there have been housing fairs [in the United States] for property in Jerusalem, Mod'in, and Herzliya, but we are the first ones to bring a housing fair for Judea and Samaria," Farbstein said. "The question isn't why we are doing this now, but why we never did it before. And the answer is, I don't know."

The campaign has been met with swift condemnation from a plethora of left-wing organizations, which held a protest on Sunday outside the Teaneck, New Jersey, synagogue where the fair was being held. About 25 protesters stood outside as some 250 American Jews streamed into the synagogue to hear the Amana sales pitch. Americans for Peace Now, which did not participate in the protest, issued a statement condemning the campaign, and spokesperson Ori Nir said "every additional home bought or built makes a peace agreement less obtainable." The event and parallel protest received considerable coverage in U.S. media outlets.

But some Jewish communal leaders say that their congregants are eager to get involved. "People want to do something good for Israel," said Rabbi Steven Pruzansky, the spiritual leader of Congregation Bnai Yeshurun, the New Jersey synagogue that sponsored the first fair. "They want to fulfill the mitzvah of settling the land of Israel and it's hard to do that in Teaneck."

Targeting Affluent Jews

According to insiders, Amana is targeting affluent Jewish communities with a strong modern Orthodox presence. For this segment of the population, they say, laying out \$150,000 for a home is hardly a financial burden. "This is a chance for Americans to put their dollars where their mouth is," said Dov Hikind, a New York State assemblyman who attended the fair and plans to buy a West Bank home in the coming weeks. "If this was purely an investment, I'd tell you to go to Wall Street."

"I believe in God and have faith, but there are no guarantees," he said when asked about the potential risk. "I don't live my life in fear that it [another evacuation] will happen. I've got to have faith and do what I think is right."

Amana has begun a serious marketing campaign, complete with a toll-free U.S. phone number. Their Web site now features extensive information in English about building possibilities, with links to each of the ten settlements involved in the campaign and possible floor plans. Color pamphlets distributed at the fair include photos of red-roofed homes with green lawns and expansive parks, with an Israeli flag waving in the background.

As part of their sales pitch, Amana representatives say that government subsidy cuts have made purchasing homes in the area increasingly costly, so that young families can no longer afford to buy there. They have warned of a potential "population freeze," which they say could jeopardize the settlement movement. "It is within your power to help this Zionist powerhouse remain steadfast in its ascent—to create a positive trend where no political party in Israel has succeeded through policy or politics, and to leave your thumbprint on the destiny of Israel," the promotional material reads.

Recent years have seen an increase in the number of American Jews who own property in Israel, and this campaign seems to be riding on the trend. But unlike other building projects, the Amana campaign is not meant to provide U.S. Jews with a vacation home. Buyers are not considering immigrating here or moving into the homes that they purchase, but rather allowing settlers to live there for them. Amana buyers are making an intentional political statement meant to ac-

tively strengthen the settlement movement. Indeed, the Amana materials tell American buyers that purchasing a home "is a giant step forward in your love of Israel in the very areas where our forefathers walked this land."

Counter to U.S. Policy

Michael Sfar, an attorney for Peace Now, filed a complaint with the attorney general against Amana last year, demanding a criminal investigation because the settler organization continues to expand its outposts. Representatives for Peace Now also take issue with the Amana claim that there is a need for such a campaign. "There are many empty houses in the settlements and there is no housing shortage," said Dror Etkes, director of Peace Now's Settlement Watch program. "They are doing this to increase their cash flow."

Activists also say that calling the project "legal" is somewhat dubious. "Settlers are supposed to get building permits, and if they have done so, selling these homes would be legal under Israeli law. Of course, it's totally illegal under international law," said Adam Keller, spokesperson for Gush Shalom.

He also says that the timing for the campaign is hardly coincidental. "The settlers need the financial and political support of the ultra-Orthodox [sic—*D. B.*] and the fundamentalist Christians in the U.S.," he added. "They would not be able to go on without it. The settlers feel that they are in a weak position—they feel that they are on borrowed time. The international consensus is that the solution will include a Palestinian state and that the Israeli settlers will have to be evacuated. They are trying to build up their position, get more housing and mobilize maximum support."

American embassy officials had no information about the legality or illegality of the project under U.S. law, but said that the expansion of settlements ran counter to American policy. Spokesman Stewart Tuttle said that buying homes in the West Bank would be a "huge risk" given the unknown results of a final status agreement.

Tuttle added that the embassy warns citizens against traveling in these areas. "Advising against residence is assumed," he said.