

Settlement Monitor

This section covers items—reprinted articles, statistics, and maps—pertaining to Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. They are reproduced as published, including original spelling and stylistic idiosyncrasies.

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THE IMPLICATIONS OF GIVAT HAMATOS

NETANYAHU CANNOT EVADE RESPONSIBILITY FOR GIVAT HAMATOS APPROVAL AND SILWAN TAKEOVERS

On 1 October 2014, Israel’s Peace Now movement revealed that the Jerusalem Municipal Planning Committee had given final approval to the construction of 2,610 units in Givat Hamatos, a new settlement in East Jerusalem. This fueled U.S. official criticism of the move, including U.S. President Obama’s rebuke of the visiting Israeli premier who lambasted Peace Now for intentionally sabotaging his trip to Washington.

The article below examines Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu’s response to the criticism of the Givat Hamatos plans and of the earlier takeover of additional Palestinian properties in the Silwan district. The analysis, published on 2 October by Terrestrial Jerusalem, was authored by Daniel Seidemann, a legal expert on East Jerusalem land policy and the founder of the nongovernmental

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organization exclusively dedicated to the issue of Jerusalem in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The article is reproduced in full and is available at t-j.org.il.

As expected, Netanyahu has rejected U.S. criticism of the approval of the new Givat Hamatos settlement in Jerusalem and the takeover by settlers of additional residential buildings in the Jerusalem neighborhoods of Silwan settlements. For background, see our reports on the new developments, [here](#) (Givat Hamatos) and [here](#) (Silwan).

Netanyahu has launched a multi-pronged, “best-defense-is-a-good-offense” response to criticism of these two major Jerusalem settlement-related developments, employing worn-out, tired arguments. Below we examine—and dismantle—each of them.

“This Is Not New” (Givat Hamatos)

- False. What is happening now is both new (as in, it is legally and technically a new development) and significantly new (as in, this new development changes the situation in significant ways).
- Last week the (final) statutory approval for the new Givat Hamatos settlement was published in the daily Hebrew and Arabic press. This was a NEW development.
- This approval flew briefly under the public’s radar due to the Rosh Hashanah holiday. When the news was discovered, it was reported by settlement watchdogs (Peace Now) and picked up in the media, precisely because it is news.
- This new development is highly significant. Prior to statutory approval, construction permits for a project may not be issued, even if all other approvals are already in place. After final statutory approval has been published, construction permits can be issued. Thus, the granting of final statutory approval is a highly consequential move.

“The Timing Is Innocent; This Is Just a Routine Bureaucratic Step” (Givat Hamatos)

- False. The Givat Hamatos plan has been pending for some time. It was approved by the Jerusalem Planning Board a couple of years back, but since that time, no action has been taken to publish the plan—publication being the final step in the statutory approval process. This step could have been taken at any time. For two years, the government of Israel held off.
- To suggest that the publication of the plan now—as the first Jerusalem settlement approval since talks fell apart, and only days before Netanyahu’s trip to UNGA and to meet with Obama—was simply a routine, bureaucratic step doesn’t pass the laugh test.
- The plan only enters effect 15 days after formal publication, which is now taking place.

“This Is Only a Technical Step” (Givat Hamatos)

- False. This is a major step towards implementation, and the final stage in the planning process. The tenders and licensing stage may now commence.
- It should be noted that this is the same claim made about Gilo in December 2009, and about Ramat Shlomo during the 2009 Biden visit. Only technical? The tenders regarding both of these plans have been published in recent months, and construction will commence in the coming weeks and months.

“It Wasn’t Me.” (Or Netanyahu’s: “I Just Work Here”) (Givat Hamatos)

- False. Netanyahu is seeking cover in the argument that at this stage of the game, the Givat Hamatos plan is under the authority of the Jerusalem Municipal Planning Committee, rather than the Prime Minister’s office. While this is true, it is a mere technicality.
- This Givat Hamatos plan was drafted and submitted by the Israel Land Authority (ILA) and the Jerusalem Development Authority (JDA), arms of the Israeli government, as a project to be carried out on State Land. The ILA has/had the authority to withdraw the plan at any stage prior to the final statutory approval. It did not do so.
- The publication of the statutory approval of the plan—this final, significant step taken last week—is made in the Government of Israel public record. According to the Ministry of Interior, this final approval requires the signature of the Minister of Interior—a member of Netanyahu’s Cabinet. The fact of publication indicates that the Minister indeed signed on to this decision.
- The claim “it wasn’t me” or “I didn’t know” is a variation on the standard “I just work here” Netanyahu response to criticisms of his government’s actions. To the extent that there is any truth in this defense, the unavoidable conclusion is that if Netanyahu didn’t know, it was because he didn’t want to know—preferring to allow spoilers in his own government and among the settlers to do his dirty work, while he claims his own hands are clean.
- However, in this case the conclusion is even more damning, because given all the attention that has been focused on Givat Hamatos in recent years (it is second only to E-1 in terms of concerns over the future of Jerusalem it causes the international community), Netanyahu simply cannot credibly assert that he didn’t know how highly problematic this settlement approval would be.
- Moreover, in this case the excuse “I didn’t know” goes beyond being merely disingenuous to being outright duplicitous. [As we reported previously](#), on September 1, 2014, the Prime Minister’s office both leaked and confirmed that Netanyahu was on the brink of publishing 1500 of the 2610 Givat Hamatos tenders—but balked at the very last minute, fearing the international response. For Netanyahu to suggest one month later that he “didn’t know” defies credulity.

“The Plan Includes New Buildings for Palestinians, Too!” (Givat Hamatos)

- False. The plan that has just been granted final statutory approval does not provide for any Palestinian construction.
- This final approval is for Givat Hamatos A (Plan 14295). It involves 2610 units, all located on what is claimed to be State Land. Plan 14295 will lead to the construction of the first new Israeli neighborhood in East Jerusalem since Har Homa.
- There are three other Givat Hamatos plans in the pipeline—Givat Hamatos B, C, and D (again, all initiated and sponsored by the ILA and JDA, acting under the authority of the government of Israel).
 - Givat Hamatos B (Plan 5834B), providing for 549 new units (pending approval, and allowing for some Palestinian construction in Beit Safafa)
 - Givat Hamatos C (Plan 5834C), providing for 813 units (not currently under consideration), and

- Givat Hamatos D (5834D), providing for 1100 hotel rooms
- As matters now stand, the only plan that is currently in the pipe line that will allow for some Palestinian construction is Plan 5834B, which has yet to be approved. The plan that HAS been approved in recent days provides for NO Palestinian construction.
- Finally, the argument that the approval provides for Palestinian construction—in addition to being entirely false—is also entirely irrelevant. The issue is NOT whether Givat Hamatos is a part of Israel which is or is not being equitably divided between Jews and Arabs. The question is whether this strategically-located site, on land that is across the Green Line, is Israel at all—and whether the answer to that question will be determined by construction equipment or through negotiations.

“This Is Just a Political Move by Peace Now to Try to Ruin the Obama-Netanyahu Meeting” (Givat Hamatos)

- False. It was the decision of the Prime Minister to approve—or allow the approval of—the Givat Hamatos plan in the days running up to his meeting with the President. If the timing of the news of this approval was inconvenient for Netanyahu, he has no one to blame but himself.
- Peace Now [reported](#) the approval—which by its nature was an emphatically public event—precisely because it is both new and significant. Israeli and international media picked up the story—and the Obama Administration raised it with Netanyahu—for the same reason. If Netanyahu had not wanted this story to overshadow his U.S. visit and his White House meeting, he has no one to blame but himself for allowing the approval to go forward.
- Notably, the fact of the plan’s approval appeared in the press before Peace Now commented on it and explained its implications. It was reported both by Palestinian settlement watcher Khalil Tufakji in the Palestinian press, and by an Ir Amim press release, but neither Tufakji nor Ir Amim pointed to the grave ramifications of the plan. To the extent that Peace Now is guilty of anything, it is guilty of understanding the true implications of the approval and doing an excellent job articulating its impact to the public, consistent with Peace Now’s settlement watchdog role.
- You can read Peace Now’s response to Netanyahu’s attack on it—and his excuses for the approval—[here](#).

“These Are Entirely Private Sector Transactions, and Jews, like Arabs, Are Allowed to Live Anywhere in Jerusalem” (Silwan)

- On the face of things, these assertions are correct. But only on the face of things. The recent takeovers indeed appear to derive from what appear to be (with a couple of potentially problematic exceptions) bona fide sales transactions. Were the context routine, this would not be problematic. However, the context is anything but routine.
- Nowhere in East Jerusalem does Israeli rule disclose the manifestations of occupation, and nowhere is that occupation more toxic, than in Silwan—where it is the declared goal of the settlers, and the undeclared goal of [the] government of Israel (as articulated in recent days by government Ministers Naftali Bennett and Uri Ariel) to turn Silwan into a Jewish neighborhood—an extension of the Jewish Quarter of the Old City.

- 90% of the settlers'-controlled properties in Silwan (including their homes) are government properties illegally transferred to the Elad settlers. All of the archeological sites and national parks in the area—which are all part of the public domain and owned by the Government of Israel—have likewise been handed over to the control of the settlers.
- Former senior leaders of Elad are now the Director General of the Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs, the head of the Jerusalem District Parks Authority, and serving in other prominent roles in other relevant government bodies. Overall, virtually all of the powers and authorities of the government of Israel in Silwan, and in relation to Silwan, are either carried out in accordance with the settlers' ideology, or outsourced to the settlers.
- Palestinian residents leading the opposition to the settler takeover of Silwan are subject to constant harassment.
- Notably, the recent takeovers were not initially secured by the police (who themselves are at the beck and call of the settlers) but by the settlers' private security firms—security that is paid for by the government of Israel (and thus by the Israeli taxpayer) to the tune of \$20 million dollars annually.
- Were it not for the massive, systematic and ongoing support and collusion between the Elad settlers and the full range of relevant Israeli governmental bodies—including in the form of large government funding—there would be no settlement in Silwan, including these recent transactions. Now that this settlement exists, it could not be maintained without this high level of government of Israel support.

“The Obama Administration Should Get the Facts Straight before Condemning Israeli Policies” (Givat Hamatos)

- Indeed the Obama Administration should get its facts straight before engaging Netanyahu over settlement-related issues—and indeed it has done so.
- Based on what has come out in public, it appears clear that the Obama Administration fully grasps the implications of the final approval of Givat Hamatos settlement, including those facts laid out above—and fully appreciates the speciousness of the arguments Netanyahu is mustering in his own defense.
- Based on repeated experience with Netanyahu, it also seems likely that the Obama Administration is not oblivious to the fact that, yet again, Netanyahu appears to be deliberately taking provocative action on settlements in order to embarrass President Obama, and then arrogantly adding insult to injury by attack[ing] Obama for daring to call him on it.

SILWAN TAKEOVER

PROPERTY TAKEOVER CAUSES DEEP CONCERN FOR RESIDENTS OF SILWAN

This article was published by Middle East Eye on 3 October 2014. It was authored by Bethan Staton. The text is available at www.middleeasteye.net.

In an unprecedented move, a group of Israeli settlers have taken over around twenty apartments in Silwan, a Palestinian neighborhood at the heart of Jerusalem. In the early hours of Tuesday

morning, and under a heavily armed private security escort, the settlers entered seven buildings across the neighborhood and established an apparently long-term presence there.

Today, the Palestinian residents of Silwan are adjusting to their new reality. With the potential to house up to 100 people, the takeover could double the settler population in the neighborhood, radically altering the levels of tension and insecurity in a community that has long felt it's on the brink.

"It's a huge shock," Nihad Siam, at the neighborhood's Wadi Hilweh Information Center, told Middle East Eye. "I still feel I'm one of the people that's still in shock. I can't believe what's happened."

In the shadow of Al Aqsa Mosque and just 300 meters from Jerusalem's Old City, Silwan is no ordinary neighborhood. It's considered the site of the Ancient City of David, the Talmudic center of Eretz Israel and a place that's crucial to Jewish history in Jerusalem. It's also a modern community that's home to more than 30,000 people. The combination makes it a tinderbox: what Daniel Seidemann, an attorney and founder of non-profit Terrestrial Jerusalem, calls the city's—even the entire region's—"Axis Mundi."

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On Wednesday, the entrance to the neighborhood was choked with fortified vehicles, and a regular changeover of police in full riot gear made their way down the hill to the seven buildings where Israeli settlers now live.

"This will cause a lot of problems for us," said Faisal, who's sitting with his large family in his garden. He was one of the many Silwan residents who awoke on Wednesday morning to find, to his dismay, that his usual neighbors had been replaced by a group of settlers and a heavy police presence. "Our life is very difficult now. Everything will change. We have a lot of children in my family. We need the space for them to play and we need freedom to move."

The family say their neighbors sold their home to an intermediary, who then passed it on to the settler group. Although the precise details about how the settlers acquired the buildings are darkened by rumor and uncertainty, it seems clear that the houses were not seized by force, and that most were likely purchased in market transactions.

At his offices in West Jerusalem, Seidemann—who has been representing families from Silwan for decades—is confident that the acquisitions were likely made through a purchase. The context of that transaction, however, and the occupied status of East Jerusalem, makes it far from a legally sound free market deal.

"The question that gets asked time and time again is 'what's wrong with people buying property?' And if you position the camera and frame it that way, the settlers are quite right," Seidemann told MEE. "But if you pull the camera back we see that in terms of context, and in terms of consequences, this is not just a real estate transaction.

"This could not take place without occupation. This could not take place without the massive material support from the highest echelons of the Israeli government," he continued. "Without the massive government support in Silwan, these purchases could not have taken place, they could not have taken place in a completely different context."

The support Seidemann refers to is received by an organization called Elad, or the Ir David Foundation—a right-wing, private settler group that's thought to be behind this week's takeover.

Elad has been coordinating and funding settler inroads into the neighborhood of Silwan since 1991.

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For the Ir David Foundation and the settlers, the ground below Silwan is the foundation of Israel's heritage, the country's very reason to be. Representatives of Elad were unavailable to comment for this article, but Seidemann said contiguity between this biblical Jerusalem and the modern city is crucial to the project. The end game, he believes, is to make "a continuation of the Jewish Quarter of the Old City," in which Palestinians could be a "tolerated minority" at best.

For those living in Silwan right now, that means "Hebronization": a situation, like that in the West Bank city of Hebron, in which heavily armed and fortified settlement enclaves scatter the neighborhood, leading to militarization and high levels of tension and violence.

"It's a state within a state," Siam, at the Wadi Hilweh Center, said as he gestured to the armored vehicle trundling down the hill. "Here, the settlers have security, they have protection; they have the right to stop and question and search us wherever we are. If any problems happen, the police don't want to do anything to help us. They assume we're guilty so they arrest us. We don't trust the police, we feel afraid to speak to them."

Where the enclaves have just been established, the dynamic is indeed uneasy and tense. Neighbors point to hastily-constructed walls around the newly occupied buildings, there are bars on the windows and police in grey khakis lounge and chat around the doorways. In one window, a young settler gives the thumbs up and grins to his new neighbor. The gesture is not reciprocated.

Homes hung with Israeli flags, the first of which have been occupied since 1991, offer some clue to what the new acquisitions will look like in the future. A great deal of effort has obviously gone into the security of these homes, with bars on the windows and a fortified metal grid concealing the front door. Somewhat incongruously, a neatly-printed Hebrew label sits below the doorbell of one house. In front and just beyond it, the public stairway is angular and clean, with polished terracotta tiles.

Just beyond it, however, the path becomes broken concrete, muddy and rubbish-strewn. Palestinians say any prosperity the settlers might bring is limited to their own tiny enclaves, while the majority population in Silwan—just 500 Israeli Jews live here among tens of thousands of Palestinians—are marginalized and forgotten.

"Since 1967 until the settlers came to live here there was nothing, no development at all in Silwan," Nihad said. "Now, they say the development is to our advantage, but it's not—it's just to the settlers' advantage. Services for an Israeli are not the same as services for an Arab, for the Palestinian. I am paying my money to the municipality, but I don't get the same things."

Despite the announcements of Economy Minister Naftali Bennett, who announced that Tuesday's development created a Jewish majority in Silwan, the new enclaves are still in an obviously Palestinian neighborhood. But for its residents, the new settlements will mean the reality of this community is fundamentally changed.

"It's the pressure on us. Every time I leave the house I feel the pressure," Nihad said. "The people now are talking about struggle but what can they do? The settlers have a success. I hate to say it, but they have a success. They have made the people disappointed. And they have made it so that there's no trust between the people living around each other. That's a success."

THE BATTLE OF SILWAN

This article was published by Middle East Eye on 2 November 2014. It was authored by Meron Rapoport, winner of the Napoli International Prize for Journalism for an inquiry about the stealing of olive trees from their Palestinian owners. The text is available at www.middleeasteye.net.

Three weeks ago, a few days after Jewish settlers took over 25 new apartments in the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan, just south of Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, a large advertisement appeared on the front page of *Haaretz* newspaper congratulating the new tenants on their “Zionist endeavor.”

“The strengthening of Jewish presence in Jerusalem is our common challenge,” went the ad. “With your settlement act, you make us proud.”

The advertisement’s content was not surprising, considering that it was sponsored by Elad, an Israeli organization that for years has advocated in favor of the Judaization of Silwan—or “City of David” as they prefer to call it.

The surprise lay in the identity of those who signed up to the ad: Nobel Laureate Eli Wiesel; Shlomo Aharonishky, ex-chief of staff of the Israeli Police; and retired general Amos Yadlin, former head of intelligence in the Israeli Defense Forces and now an influential commentator and a possible future contender for the leadership of the Labor Party.

In short, not a bunch of right-wing lunatics but the flesh and bone of the Israeli establishment.

When Jewish settlement in Silwan began more than twenty years ago, the situation was totally different. Since its occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, Israel has confiscated large pieces of land from their Palestinian owners in order to build large new neighborhoods for Jews only, while deliberately refraining from integrating Jews into dense Palestinian quarters.

A project for settling in Silwan, a village that became one of the poorest neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, was supported and sponsored by the then construction minister Ariel Sharon, but the plan was outside mainstream Israeli politics. The Labor Party protested against this move and the police ordered the settlers to leave the houses they had broken into on the grounds of fear for “public security.” A few weeks later, however, the settlers were allowed to return.

Silwan was attractive to proponents of Jewish settlement for two main reasons. The first is emotional and religious. The northern part of the neighborhood, adjacent to Al Aqsa/Temple Mount, sits on an archeological site that is commonly called “City of David.” More than a hundred years of almost constant excavations have not revealed undisputed proof of King David’s presence on the hill, but this has not deterred settlers and their followers from considering this area as the place where Jewish sovereignty began 3,000 years ago.

The second reason has to do with politics. The first settlers entered Silwan in October 1991, coinciding with the opening of the Madrid Conference, the first such meeting at which Israel was forced to sit face-to-face with a Palestinian delegation.

Settling inside populated neighborhoods at the heart of the Holy Basin surrounding the Old City was supposed to make sure that Jerusalem would not be divided into Palestinian and Israeli parts, and, if divided, ensure that the Old City would remain in Israeli hands.

The fact that Silwan was at the center of the Palestinian uprising in Jerusalem known as the First Intifada, which started in late 1987, also helped to make it a target for tighter Israeli control.

With Itzhak Rabin's government in 1992 and the Oslo agreements that followed, the division of Jerusalem between Israel and a future Palestinian state became a much more relevant option and the Silwan settlers were pushed into a political corner.

They continued to try to buy new houses and apartments, investing millions of dollars in shady deals, but their successes were limited.

Then, at the end of the 1990s, the settlers, headed by the Elad organization, came up with a better idea: instead of leading a frustrating battle from house to house, which portrayed them as right-wing extremists, they decided to make the issue of the City of David/Silwan into a national matter, around which broad consensus could be achieved.

Elad's idea was to use the Jewish historical attachment to the City of David for its own political aims. It took over management of the City of David National Park (part of the Jerusalem Walls National Park), which sits on the archeological site at the northern part of Silwan, through secret deals with government authorities. It then began investing tens [of] millions of dollars in excavations, sophisticated audiovisual effects, and exit tunnels dug under the houses of Palestinian Silwan.

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Archeology also served a much greater aim. Through their control over the national park, the settlers dramatically widened their sway over Silwan. Palestinians living there were put under growing pressure, their movement became limited, and privately-paid security guards, sponsored by the government but controlled by the settlers, made their lives impossible.

Above all, making City of David/Silwan into a Jewish "national heritage" site legitimized the settlers' activity there in a way not previously possible. It allowed them also to penetrate Israel's state apparatus. The present head of the National Park Authority, responsible for the City of David Park, has served on the board of Elad. The new chairman of the Archeological Council carried out the archaeological digging in Silwan. The general manager of the Tourism Ministry is a senior Elad member.

For many Israelis, including some in the center and center-left, Silwan is now poised to become part of Israeli Jerusalem, if and when a separation will come about. The respectable list of names on Elad's ad is part of this change.

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On the issue of the future of Jerusalem, thanks in part to the settlers' efforts in "normalizing" Israeli control over East Jerusalem, there is a wide agreement in Israeli society. It is not by chance that "defending Jerusalem" became one [of] the main themes of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's shift to the right, evident in his speech to the Knesset at the beginning of last week.

From this point of view, the combined moves—on Temple Mount, or Haram al-Sharif as it is known to the Palestinians, and in Silwan—had an immediate political effect. The declaration by Uri Ariel, a senior minister from the Jewish Home party, about his intention to move to Silwan is part of the same trend.

The price has been the heightening of tensions in Jerusalem to a dangerous point. Israel believes it can contain these tensions. It may be proved wrong.

WEST BANK LAND EXPROPRIATION IN GAZA AFTERMATH

“LAND GRAB SHOWS NETANYAHU UNBOWED AFTER GAZA”

This article was published by Middle East Eye on 4 September 2014. It was authored by Jonathan Cook, a British journalist based in Nazareth and past winner of the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. The text is available at www.middleeasteye.net.

With Israel and Hamas locked in military stalemate after their 50-day confrontation in Gaza, attention had returned to reviving a peace process between Israel and Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas.

That is the context for assessing Israel’s decision to antagonize all its main partners against Hamas—the United States, Europe, Egypt, Jordan and, in practice, Abbas’s Palestinian Authority—by announcing plans this week for the biggest land grab in the West Bank in three decades.

In normal circumstances, this would look like an example of shooting oneself in the foot. But, as Israeli analyst Jeff Halper pointed out, Israel rarely abides by normal rules.

“What Netanyahu is doing looks completely counter-intuitive. It makes no sense. You would think he would want less criticism right now from the international community. He needs the Palestinian Authority and Mahmud Abbas to help him take back control of Gaza.”

Yesterday, U.S. secretary of state John Kerry [phoned](#) Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, reportedly to demand he reverse his decision.

Barack Obama’s administration is said to have been angered not only by the decision itself—which seized 1,000 acres of Palestinian land near Bethlehem—but by Israel’s failure even to warn it in advance.

Confrontation with U.S.

Israeli analysts have noted that the clash over the land expropriation—intended to build a fifth West Bank city for settlers, called Gvaot, south of Jerusalem—marks yet another downturn in increasingly fraught relations between Israel and Washington.

“This is a major embarrassment to the U.S. There it is trying to coax Abbas back into negotiations while Israel blatantly undermines its efforts,” Halper told Middle East Eye.

Israeli officials have tried to play down the seizure as nothing more than a technicality, though it has not helped their justifications that the move’s timing has been widely [presented](#) as “revenge” for the murder in June of three Israeli teenagers in a location close by in the West Bank.

Officials argue that Palestinians have no private claims on the land; that it is part of the Gush Etzion settlement bloc, which, they claim, will be awarded to Israel in a final peace agreement; and that the area has long been earmarked for Israeli settlement.

In addition to Israel’s violation of international law in seizing the land, observers note that there are already five Palestinian communities there, and that the new settlement will contribute to Jerusalem’s encirclement, sealing it off from the West Bank and further damaging the prospects of a viable Palestinian state emerging.

Yesterday, Dror Etkes, an expert on the settlements for the Israeli peace organization Peace Now, [noted](#) that the swath of land would create a territorial corridor between Israel and the Gush Etzion bloc.

Nearly a fifth of the expropriated land actually lies beyond Israel's separation barrier, sometimes assumed to be the demarcation of its territorial acquisitiveness.

Payback for the Settlers

Daniel Seidemann, a Jerusalem lawyer who specializes in land issues, told Middle East Eye that this latest decision was payback for the settlers, who had helped Netanyahu during the seven weeks of Operation Protective Edge by not opening up another front with the international community.

“During the Gaza operation, the settlers kept silent. They were like the dog that didn't bark in the night. That was intentional. Netanyahu told them ‘sit back during the operation and I'll make it up to you afterwards.’”

In many ways, Washington's opposition to this move echoes its anger at Netanyahu's attempt in late 2012 to annex the so-called E1 area, west of Jerusalem, which also threatened to cut off Jerusalem from its Palestinian hinterland.

It remains to be seen whether U.S. pressure will force a climbdown this time from Netanyahu, [as it eventually did when he agreed to “delay” his E1 plans.](#)

But whatever the final decision, the reality is that plans for encircling Jerusalem are constantly on the drawing board, and are making slow, incremental progress, as a report by the International Crisis Group [revealed](#). Israeli leaders simply seek the best moment to try to browbeat Washington into submission on any particular component of the plan.

Netanyahu's reasons for taking on the U.S. now are likely to be complex.

Plummeting Popularity

Not least in his calculations, he needs to show an achievement in the West Bank to answer the many domestic critics of his performance in Gaza.

His popularity has [plummeted](#) since he signed a ceasefire agreement. A majority of the Israeli public, and especially his supporters on the right, expected him to crush Hamas, not to negotiate terms with it.

He has also been under fire from government coalition rivals further to the right, such as Avigdor Lieberman and Naftali Bennett, who have implied not so subtly that he demonstrated weakness in Gaza.

The crisis he has now provoked is undoubtedly designed to deflect a little the attention of the Israeli public and media from what are seen as his failures in Gaza and show that he is playing hardball with the Palestinians.

But possibly even more useful, Netanyahu has engineered a confrontation with the U.S. that will remind the Israeli public of the international climate within which he must work, both in relation to Gaza and the West Bank.

Faced with another showdown with Washington, Netanyahu can claim both that he is a tough-guy and that, much better than his political rivals, he knows how to navigate the intricacies of such

diplomatic entanglements. He has taken on the White House on several notable occasions before and won.

And by grabbing land near the Gush Etzion settlements, Netanyahu has also chosen an issue over which it will be difficult for local critics to berate him.

Lieberman, who is the most famous resident of Nokdim, one of Gush Etzion's settlements, has [pointed](#) out correctly that the area Netanyahu has seized "reflects a wide-ranging consensus in Israeli society."

Voices of Dissent

Tzipi Livni and Yair Lapid have been the only notable [voices of dissent](#) in the cabinet, but neither is likely to threaten the coalition's survival by resigning on this matter.

Livni, who has cultivated strong ties to the Obama administration, has indicated that she supports the seizure in principle. Her opposition is over [the timing](#), when Israel is isolated and needs U.S. support in international forums.

More significant is what the decision to seize such a large area of land reveals about Netanyahu's attitude towards Abbas and the two-state solution, as well as his approach to the international community.

Yariv Oppenheimer, the head of Peace Now, has [called](#) the move a "stab in the back . . . proving again that violence delivers Israeli concessions while nonviolence results in settlement expansion."

According to polls, Hamas has [surged](#) in popularity among Palestinians since the ceasefire, and Netanyahu's move will do nothing to revive Abbas's fortunes.

Israel is reported to want Abbas's assistance in taking back whatever limited control of Gaza Israel will allow, presumably as a prelude to enforcing Hamas's disarmament. Abbas wants Gaza too, because it will strengthen his claim to being the true representative of the Palestinian people. On paper at least, Netanyahu and Abbas should be on the same page on this issue.

But the price from Abbas, as he revealed this week, is Israel's cooperation with his newly minted peace plan, which Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat presented to Kerry yesterday.

Reports [suggest](#) the plan will echo Kerry's original timetable and framework for the talks that collapsed in April, with nine months for the two sides to reach an agreement. Israel would be expected to withdraw from the agreed area, based on the pre-1967 borders, within three years.

However, this time Abbas will insist on no settlement building for the duration of the negotiations and there will be a tangible Palestinian threat if the process fails: unilateral moves in international forums, including pursuing war crimes trials at the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Opposition to Statehood

Neither option—conceding Palestinian statehood, or risking war crimes trials—will appeal to Netanyahu. But if forced to make a choice, he would probably much rather call Abbas's bluff over the ICC than allow him a state, even a demilitarized, non-sovereign one.

Back in July, Netanyahu made clear his fundamental opposition to allowing the Palestinians the trappings of statehood in the West Bank. He [stated](#) that "there cannot be a situation, under any

agreement, in which we relinquish security control” of the West Bank. Noting that the West Bank was 20 times the size of Gaza, he added that he was not prepared to “create another 20 Gazas.”

In doing so, he effectively equated Abbas with Hamas, which in turn he has equated with the Islamic extremist group ISIS.

As Gideon Levy, a columnist for the *Haaretz* daily, has **concluded**: “The settlers have won. The settlements have accomplished their goal. The two-state solution is dead.”

So where does that leave Israel and Abbas?

In Abbas’s case, with a few stark choices. He could mount a more forceful campaign to win statehood at the United Nations, or he could go down the ICC route. Both would lead to a serious confrontation with the United States.

The final choice would be to hand over the keys of the Palestinian Authority, leaving Israel to pick up the mess—and the considerable bill—afterwards. That is reportedly what he **told** the emir of Qatar this week. If there was no agreement, “we will take the following measure: cessation of the security coordination and transfer of responsibility for PA territory to Netanyahu.”

Catastrophic Scenarios

In Israel’s case, analysts see things going in one of two directions.

One possibility is that Israel will find its isolation and pariah status growing. The comparisons with apartheid will deepen, as will the paradigm shift to a one-state solution. Early signs will be a rapid increase in various forms of boycotts, such as an **imminent one** from the European Union on settlement produce.

It was this scenario that presumably prompted the concerns **expressed** in an editorial in today’s *Haaretz* about the latest land grab: “This is an intolerable display of arrogance and impudence, and its price is liable to be catastrophic.”

The other possibility, set out by Jeff Halper, who has been studying Israel’s system of control over the occupied territories for many years, posits an even bleaker future.

He believes Netanyahu may assume he can hold on to international support as he crushes all Palestinian hopes—military and diplomatic—of resistance to Israel’s complete dominance.

“Israel is denying the Palestinians a moment to regroup. The pressure is on them all the time, wearing them down, exhausting them as Israel takes control inch by inch.

Netanyahu, he says, may think that he can “pacify” Abbas and the Palestinians, with them coming to understand both that there is no political process and that in practice there are no countervailing forces on Israel.

“Rather than being an outcast, Israel believes it can convince everyone—the U.S., Europe, the Arab states—that it has the solutions. It excels in a kind of security politics, and claims to know how to beat ‘the terrorists.’ Ultimately, that may gain it more credit with other states than respecting peace and human rights.”

Halper concedes that Netanyahu may be mistaken in such assumptions, leaving himself with no exit strategy when things turn sour.

Whoever is right, this week’s land grab indicates that Netanyahu is unbowed after Gaza and in no mood for making concessions.

ISRAELI GOVERNMENT VOTES TO SUPPORT ANNEXING WEST BANK SETTLEMENTS

This article was published by +972 Magazine on 10 November 2014. It was authored by Michael Schaeffer Omer-Man, the magazine's managing editor. The text is available at www.972mag.com.

The Israeli government [voted to endorse](#) legislation to extend Israeli law to settlements in the West Bank on Sunday.

What would that mean, you ask? For 47 years, the primary source of law in the West Bank has been the IDF military law code. Applying civilian law to parts—or all—of the West Bank would be tantamount to annexation, or at least be a creeping but concrete step toward that goal.

Irrespective of [whether or not this latest proposal is ever passed](#), the vote itself broadcasts to the entire world that the majority of ministers in the Israeli government support annexing West Bank settlements—a “[unilateral move](#)” if there ever was one.

In fact, even if the current version of the bill goes no further than it already has, it will have accomplished its authors' goal: to move Israelis ever closer to stomaching the idea of annexation.

Events like the fall of the Berlin Wall are anomalies: most change happens gradually and it is often not even noticed until it's too late. That is how the Israeli Right feels about the international and domestic support for Palestinian statehood these days, and that is how the Israeli Right plans to subvert that same idea. Baby steps. Facts on the ground.

The bill's author, Knesset member Orit Struck, herself a settler in the West Bank city of Hebron, [explained to settler news outlet Arutz Sheva](#) a few weeks ago how she and MK Yariv Levin have prepared 10 draft laws that would annex the West Bank in stages: first individual settlements, then Area C, and eventually, everything West of the Jordan River.

But Israel is not ready to stomach full annexation, Struck explained, “[w]e must aim towards something that the Israeli public, with its present situation, would be able to digest.”

“As of now, it is impossible to create such a basis of support for the idea of annexing the entire area including Ramallah, Nablus and more cities,” she added. “That's why we must continue in what has been the Zionist way, which has always been a gradual path.”

It's not really newsworthy that someone like MK Struck is attempting to advance plans to annex the West Bank, or even that she has a plan to do it subversively. After all, she was chosen to become a Knesset member by none other than settlement champion Naftali Bennett (he even ran for office [on an annexation platform](#)).

Struck it seems, like many other far more palatable Israeli politicians, views [the current situation](#)—sky rocketing nationalist and racist sentiments combined with the fear accompanying what many believe could be a looming, dark period of violence and repression—as a political opportunity.

In periods like this, stained by ongoing violence, societal polarization and political desperation, one of the most dangerous things that can happen is for responsible leadership to be shoved aside by populism and political opportunism.

What we are seeing today is the true face of Israel's government and its ministers: one that unabashedly supports—in practice as well as in rhetoric—the expansion and annexation of illegal

settlements. It is a government that opposes Palestinian statehood, and [has no intention of ending the occupation](#) of its own accord.

The European Union's new foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, made her first official visit to Israel a couple of days ago. In Jerusalem she expressed hopes for "a new start," ostensibly referring to the growing animosity between the EU and Israel over the latter's unrepentant and unrelenting settlement expansion.

There may be a new start in the cards, but not the one Mogherini is hoping for.

ISRAELI SETTLEMENT SUBSIDIES

HOW MUCH MONEY GOES TO ISRAEL'S SETTLEMENTS EACH YEAR?

This article was published by Al-Monitor on 12 September 2014. It was authored by Daniel Ben Simon, former Labor Party Knesset member. The text is available at www.al-monitor.com.

Of the thousands of clauses in the Israeli state's annual budget, allocations to [settlements in the territories](#) remain the most concealed—a kind of state secret. While allocations to education, welfare and security are (to a certain degree) public information, no one in Israel has been able to decipher the secret of settlement allocations.

So how much money is distributed to the settlements every year? Who holds the purse strings? And is the money transferred to the settlements over or under the table?

Conventional wisdom holds that we are talking about billions. Full disclosure of the amount is liable to enrage the world, since the international community regards the settlements as illegal entities built on conquered land. Not only is the world likely to protest, but the Israeli public would, too, if they knew the true amount transferred to the settlers, and at whose expense.

We have to be honest and admit that settlement allocations reflect the state's priorities.

On Sept. 8, the Adva Center published a special report that dares to reveal one facet of the deep, dark secret: the [inequality in governmental funding for municipal budgets](#) from 1991-2012. The report is a true reflection of a different Israel, the Israel after the Six Day War.

The report's authors, Shlomo Swirski and Ety Konor-Attias, emphasize that in the last 20 years, the number of settlers in the territories soared by 240%, in contrast to a 60% increase in the overall Israeli population. The three ultra-Orthodox settlements of Immanuel, Beitar Illit and Modi'in Illit experienced the biggest increase in settler populations, with residents there increasing by 376%.

Even more critical is the inequality between the [budget allocations for settlements](#) and funding for towns in the periphery. The government goes out of its way to trumpet its commitment to strengthening the towns in the periphery, in the country's north and the south, with the goal of narrowing inequality between them and the center of the country. Yet, the Adva Center report paints a depressing picture of broken promises.

According to the report, in 2012 the highest per capita government spending was in the settlements in the territories, at 2,695 Israeli shekels (about \$745) per settler. In the development

towns, by contrast, the per capita outlay was only 1,892 shekels (about \$523). In fact, it emerged that per capita [government spending decreased](#) over the years only in the development towns.

Swirski told the Israeli financial newspaper *TheMarker* that until 1997, the development towns had been Israel's greatest settlement enterprise, but "[t]oday it holds an inferior position by all parameters, in contrast to the ideological settlements. That is part of the reason that the settlements (except for the ultra-Orthodox ones) are on a middle-high socio-economic status, while the [development towns are middle-low status](#)."

The Israeli public did not lose its collective cool at the report's findings, which were buried in the back pages of newspapers like old news. But visitors to the Etzion settlement bloc or the northern Jerusalem area on the way to Ramallah will marvel over the magnitude of construction in the settlements. Heavy machinery operates around the clock. While the populations of development towns in Israel's south have not increased over the last two decades, most settlements have seen their populations multiply several times over. Ofra and Beit El, near Ramallah, have become real towns, each boasting thousands of inhabitants. From almost every window, one can look out on the neighboring Palestinians. The distance between Ramallah and its surrounding settlements has gone from hundreds of meters to mere dozens.

Giving preferential treatment to the settlements is nothing new. Israel adopted this approach after the 1967 Six Day War, and it has reflected the priorities of successive Israeli governments. These governments operated under the same ideological perspective: the settlement enterprise is a huge strategic asset for Israel. A special report by the state comptroller in 2000 on the southern periphery was an incisive indictment of Israel's governments regarding their treatment of the towns in the periphery.

The [Peace Now](#) movement, which keeps close track of settlement expansion, posted the following on its Facebook page: "It is important to remember that the settlers represent only 4% of Israeli citizens. Yet the budgetary allocations and national priority they receive come at the expense of the education, housing, welfare and infrastructure allocations of the rest of Israeli citizens—the other 96%."

The Yesha Council, a settlement umbrella organization, attacked the Adva Center findings. The group, which includes settler leaders, argued that the report pits one population against another. The council's deputy director, [Yigal Dilmoni](#), told Channel 7 radio on Sept. 9, "The Adva Center targeted first the Judea and Samaria settlement enterprise, and only afterward manipulated data in every possible way to portray the settlers [*sic*] as the blackmailing Jew. The report is distorted and falsified."

This debate has accompanied Israeli politics ever since Israel captured the [West Bank](#) and the Gaza Strip after the Six Day War. "In 1967, Israeli society turned its back on [Israel's first Prime Minister David] Ben-Gurion's legacy, according to which we must never settle in the heart of densely populated Palestinian centers," said professor Shlomo Ben-Ami, who served as foreign minister in former Prime Minister Ehud Barak's government. "Unfortunately, we have betrayed Zionism's two central values. We went to the very heart of the Arab population, and we also abandoned the Negev."

AMERICANS CASHING IN ON SETTLEMENT REAL ESTATE

WHY IS A COLORADO FIRM SELLING APARTMENTS IN ISRAEL'S ILLEGAL SETTLEMENTS?

This article was published by Electronic Intifada on 13 November 2014. It was authored by Ben Norton, a freelance writer and journalist, with additional reporting by David Cronin. The text is available at www.electronicintifada.net.

The Colorado-based real estate firm RE/MAX is profiting from Israel's relentless theft of Palestinian land.

Active in the Israeli market since 1995, RE/MAX sells and rents houses and apartments in colonies reserved exclusively for Jews in the occupied [West Bank](#), including [East Jerusalem](#). Much of that work is coordinated in an [office](#) that the [Israeli subsidiary of RE/MAX](#) runs in [Maale Adumim](#), a major [settlement](#) in the West Bank.

A United Nations [report](#) published last year suggested that the firm's parent company in the U.S. could be "held accountable" for assisting Israel's crimes. RE/MAX International, which is headquartered in Denver, "has constant interaction and influence" over its franchises around the world. The company also provides "brand name affiliation," training and other services, according to [Richard Falk](#), the report's author, who was then the UN special rapporteur for the West Bank and [Gaza](#).

"Closet Space" for Settlers

On its website, RE/MAX offers properties in a number of settlement colonies in East Jerusalem, which has been under Israeli occupation since 1967. A four-room apartment with "lots of closet space" can be [rented](#) for 4,400 shekels (\$1,100) per month. Among the apartment's attractions listed by RE/MAX are proximity to the [light rail system](#) which links Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem to the city center.

Such settlements violate the [Fourth Geneva Convention](#), which forbids an occupying power from transferring its civilian population into a territory that it occupies.

Prospective [settlers](#) with a larger budget were recently offered what RE/MAX [describes](#) as "a beautiful old Arab house" in the [Abu Tor](#) neighborhood for 7 million shekels (\$1.8 million).

Posing as a prospective buyer, an Electronic Intifada reporter phoned Orly Raz, a RE/MAX agent for East Jerusalem. Raz said that "we have just sold everything" that the firm was handling in Abu Tor.

Claiming that he would be moving to [Jerusalem](#) in early 2015, the reporter inquired if there would be any legal difficulties in buying a house or an apartment that previously belonged to Palestinians. "You don't have to worry about these things," Raz replied. "All our properties legally belong to Jewish owners. They didn't take them from anyone."

"Of course, if you are worried about the '67 border line, this is not a good area to buy property," she added.

"Check Very Carefully"

Raz then asked: "Are you Jewish?" When the reporter responded that he was not, she said: "You have to check the properties—if their owners say they can sell an apartment to non-Jewish people." She added, however, that such conditions are not mentioned on the firm's website.

When the reporter feigned surprise that a real estate firm might discriminate based on religion or ethnicity, Raz said: “I’m just saying this is an issue to check very carefully.”

[Ateret Cohanim](#), a Zionist organization, has been [known](#) to buy Palestinian homes in Abu Tor, so that they can be passed on to Israeli settlers.

Abu Tor has also witnessed considerable brutality by Israeli forces against its Palestinian residents lately. In late October, Israeli police officers broke into a house of a Palestinian living in Abu Tor, [shooting him dead](#).

And in the first week of November, two Palestinian buildings were [demolished](#) in Abu Tor at the instruction of the Israeli authorities.

RE/MAX has enjoyed fawning coverage in the Israeli press. In 2004, the newspaper *Haaretz* published a [profile](#) of Bernard Raskin, the chief executive of RE/MAX Israel. Zimbabwean-born Raskin claimed that his firm had become a leading player in the Israeli property market because its competitors had “no professionalism.”

During a 2013 real estate conference in [South Africa](#), Raskin [noted](#) that the Israeli economy has not suffered as severely as many others during the recession of recent years. One problem he identified was that “there is generally a shortage of stock.”

He added, however, that “more and more building is taking place outside of [Tel Aviv](#), where property is expensive.”

Money from Crime

The Israeli authorities have ensured that RE/MAX will have new business, thanks to the ongoing expansion of Jewish-only settlements in East Jerusalem and the wider West Bank. Earlier this month, the Israeli-controlled Jerusalem municipality [announced](#) that it had rubber-stamped the construction of new housing units in Ramot, a settlement in East Jerusalem. RE/MAX is already [active](#) in Ramot.

Although the U.S. government says it is [opposed](#) to the construction of Israeli settlements, it has refused to impose sanctions on Israel. Because of that refusal, RE/MAX can continue turning violations of international law into a money-making opportunity.

The Colorado headquarters of RE/MAX International did not respond to requests for comment.

While the company’s Israeli operations may have some autonomy, RE/MAX International cannot claim that these matters have nothing to do with it. As the UN made clear in its aforementioned 2013 report, RE/MAX wields considerable influence over its franchises around the world.

The Palestinian-led [boycott, divestment and sanctions](#) movement has succeeded in putting the spotlight on how corporations like [Veolia](#) and [G4S](#) aid the Israeli occupation. Given that RE/MAX is so directly involved in the settlements that are central to that occupation, there is a strong case for putting the firm under the same kind of pressure.