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SETTLEMENT MONITOR

EDITED BY GEOFFREY ARONSON

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

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SETTLEMENTS AFTER THE 2003 ELECTIONS

STRANGULATION BY SETTLEMENT

From Settlement Report, March–April 2003.

Israel has just elected Ariel Sharon for a second term, an expression of public support not bestowed on an Israeli prime minister since Menachem Begin. International efforts to fill the diplomatic vacuum created by the destruction of the Oslo process continue to proceed in fits and starts, without much confidence of success. While most international attention is focused on these two features of the political and diplomatic landscape of the conflict, the best barometer of relations between Israelis and Palestinians is, and remains, the state of affairs in the occupied territories themselves.

A recent visit to the region south of Jerusalem highlights two prominent aspects of this continuing and unequal battle for control of the land. In virtually every Israeli settlement, colonization efforts are proceeding apace. These include new housing construc-

tion, contiguous to existing development and in new outposts along adjoining mountain ridges, and extensive site preparation for future development. Revolutionary changes in patterns of transportation and access are also in the works. There are new roads for Israeli settlers, aimed at facilitating safe travel to Israel and encouraging economic development. In contrast, the dynamic for Palestinians is just the opposite—an ever-increasing network of barricades, obstacles, patrol roads, and prohibitions that isolate them from settlements, each other, and from places of work, compromising their ability to lead normal lives and impoverishing an entire national community.

These elements of everyday life are at once contradictory and complementary. They illustrate the contrast between the unequal fortunes of settlers and their Palestinian neighbors while sustaining the overall impression of an Israeli policy that by design and execution aims at consolidating Israel's ability to secure a permanent hold over these lands.

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The Palestinian village of Azariyya offers no better metaphor for this extraordinary state of affairs. The village is defined by the road that passes through it from Jerusalem to Jericho. Today, the road is impassable. Israel has constructed a concrete wall across the road at the eastern perimeter of Jerusalem's municipal boundary, splitting the village in two.

Hardly five kilometers distant, a new road has opened to connect Jerusalem with the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim, itself built in part on Azariyya's patrimony.

This road features a tunnel under Mt. Scopus, not unlike the Tunnel Road that links the East Jerusalem settlement of Gilo with the Etzion settlement bloc to the south. For a time, Palestinian snipers had all but closed this route to settlers—since the outbreak of the intifada they are the only Israelis who travel the West Bank—but today the route is lined with concrete barriers.

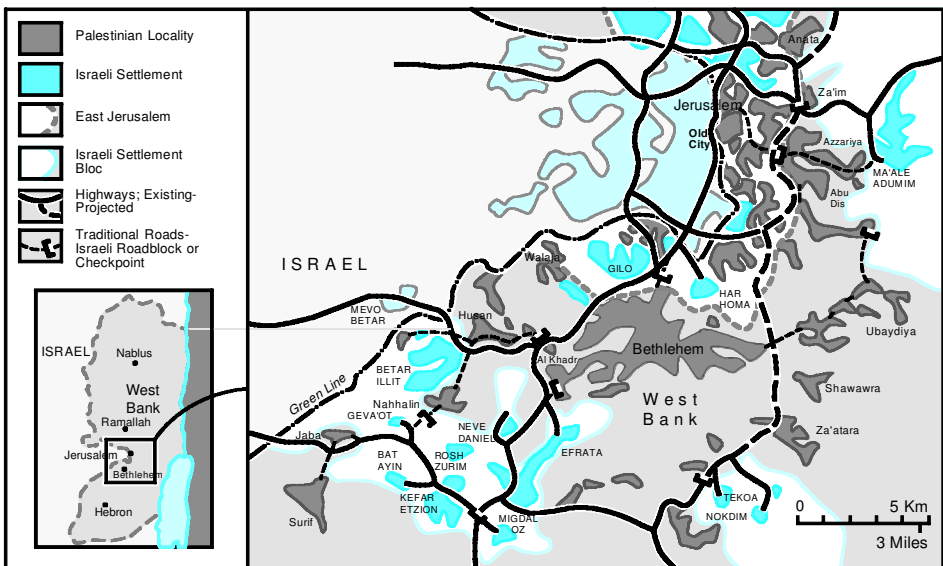
The road is meant to serve residents of the settlement of Beitar Ilit, home to almost 20,000 members of the ultra-Orthodox Haredi community. After transiting the tunnels, the road continues past al-Khadar. The road linking the village to this main thoroughfare has been blockaded. As a consequence, villagers walk to a nearby lot where buses await. Such blockades, which have grown more extensive and impermeable over the months of rebellion, mean that Palestinian vehicles with their distinctive green

and white license plates have all but disappeared from the principle West Bank roadways.

The road to Beitar Ilit continues past the village of Husan. Ten meters from the road a wire fence at least five meters tall—to keep settlers safe from stones—surrounds the village's southern perimeter. High intensity lights shine directly into homes.

Beitar Ilit serves a community of Orthodox Jews marked by poverty and high birth-rates. Affordable housing in the recently incorporated municipality has catapulted Beitar Ilit to the top of the list of fastest growing settlements. Panoramic views from the nearby village of Nahalin bring Israel's patented methods of settlement expansion into view. The settlement is growing along the hilltops and down into the wadis that just separate the settlement from Nahalin. Nahalin is growing too, also in the direction of the wadi, but the limited resources that villagers can bring to bear do not compare with the transformation of Beitar Ilit into a sea of red-roofed apartment houses. The view from the heights of Nahalin looking west shows the haphazard growth of the village below, almost to the well-defined limits of Beitar Ilit, whose neat rows of apartments give way to extensive land preparation for future development. Within easy sight is Mevo Beitar to the west, just across the Green Line.

Etzion Bloc and Environs - March 2003



Nahalin's predicament offers vivid testimony to the situation faced by many villages today. It is confronted by the expanding territorial footprint of Beitar Ilit to the west. On a hilltop to the southeast is Rosh Zurim, part of the Etzion settlement bloc. To the northeast is Neve Daniel, spreading across the hilltops. The old road leading from Nahalin past the settlement and to the main thoroughfare to Bethlehem and Hebron is now blocked by stones. There is no need for an Israeli checkpoint. Further to the south lies Bet Ayin and, to the southwest, Giva'ot. The latter is today a small outpost on a hilltop. If all proceeds according to plan, it will someday be a town of many thousands, part of Ariel Sharon's effort to establish a series of towns along the old Green Line.

A quick reading of the compass, and a bird's-eye view across this striking landscape, establishes that Nahalin has been encircled by expanding Israeli settlements. Ariel Sharon planned it this way, and his territorial vision is being realized. In contrast, local and international efforts to confront, let alone roll back, the new reality being fashioned every day out of soil, stone, and barbed wire appear hopelessly inadequate.

DODGING THE QUESTION ON ISRAEL'S ILLEGAL OUTPOSTS

The following article by Akiva Eldar, titled "The Answers Mofaz is Seeking for His Outpost Studies," ran in Ha'Aretz on 27 February 2003.

Shinui has quite a few members who carried signs at Peace Now demonstrations against the occupation and the settlements. The party's Knesset faction also has a solid majority of lawyers. Now they have a justice minister who will belong to the security cabinet.

Yosef (Tommy) Lapid convinced his colleagues that the political peace process is unimportant "because of the terror and because we don't have a partner." But one could expect that before signing the agreement with Sharon, the "leftist post" in the coalition would ask a question or two about the settlements. One could hope that the Knight of Law and Order would find out how the government he's joining plans to deal with the wildcat outposts scattered throughout the occupied territories. As the self-appointed guardian of the soldiers, through his opposition to the Tal Law [which exempts Yeshiva students from army service], presumably Lapid will insist that the

boys don't spend the winter guarding law-breakers and land grabbers.

When Amram Mitzna asked Sharon what would happen to the illegal outposts, the prime minister replied disingenuously, "of course those that are illegal should be dismantled." Sharon even sent a barb in the direction of Mitzna's predecessor, then-defense minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, "who didn't manage to remove them." And what about the current defense minister, Shaul Mofaz? According to his own testimony before the Knesset plenum last 14 November, Ben-Eliezer left him a booklet prepared by the ministry's professional echelon detailing thirty-two illegal outposts. Mofaz said at the time that he is "still studying the subject." It's difficult to believe Mofaz did not and still doesn't know that even Havat Gilad, the one outpost that Fuad [Ben-Eliezer] did manage to evacuate, is still alive and kicking.

Since then, three and a half months have gone by, and the man who could teach the generals of the IDF a thing or two about locating an illegal outpost is still studying the issue. His media adviser said that when he became minister, Mofaz appointed a committee to examine the issue. The committee is made up of representatives from the Civil Administration, the government coordinator in the territories, the attorney general's office, the minister's assistant on settlement affairs, and the Custodian of Abandoned Property. The minister, it was said, will make a decision on the basis of the committee's recommendations. The spokesman said, "In any case, the defense establishment is acting and will continue to act, according to the attorney general's instructions, with uncompromising attention to obeying the law."

It turns out Mitzna was not satisfied with Sharon's evasive answers and Mofaz dodging the question. Mitzna used his contacts in the defense establishment to find out whether the committee Mofaz appointed to "examine the issue" is actually meant to kosher the treif. A simple question to the IDF spokesman and the government coordinator in the territories—"How much time does it take your people on the ground to locate a wildcat road or illegal placement of a mobile home on a hilltop?"—hit a brick wall.

"Ask the Defense Ministry," was their answer.

As a service to the defense minister, who is studying the issue of the illegal outposts, and as a gesture to the committee working on solving the problem for the last three

months, here's some "top secret" material about the situation on the ground in the jurisdictions of two regional authorities, Binyamin and Gaza—straight from the regional authorities' official Web sites (www.katif.net and www.binyamin.org.il) where there's an impressive update regarding the settlements.

There's not much evidence on the Web sites that anyone is trying to hide the illegal outposts. On the contrary. The sites explain how the veteran trick works: establish the new settlement in the guise of a neighborhood of an existing one. Here are some selected examples, in abridged form:

Mitzpe Hagit Outpost: Named for Hagit Zavitzki, daughter of Kfar Adumim, who was murdered with her friend Liat Kastiel in Nahal Prat in 1998. A year after the murder, the settlement was established by the Ben-Dor family, which felt the need to take action after the murder and wanted to contribute to the territorial contiguity of Jewish settlements on the Alon Road in an area where Bedouin tribes are taking over the territory. The Ben-Dor family was joined by two other families, but in the wake of the 'outpost agreement' between Yesha leaders and then-prime minister Ehud Barak, the families were evacuated and temporarily moved to nearby settlements. However, with the outbreak of the bloodshed in Tishrei 5761 [fall 2001], the Ben-Dor family returned to Mitzpe Hagit. For six months they lived there alone but now there are five families, religious and secular, who want to make their living there as close to nature and the land as possible.

Aish Kadosh Outpost: On the seam line between Binyamin and the Jordan Valley, 6 kilometers northeast of Shvut Rachel, 799 meters above sea level. The place was named Aish Kadosh (Holy Fire), after Aish Kadosh Gilmore, a security guard at the National Insurance Institute offices in East Jerusalem, who was murdered at the beginning of the intifada. The settlement began with a water tower in the winter of 5759 [1999], which was taken down in the context of the outpost removal agreement between Yesha and the Barak administration. Shortly afterward, a group of young men moved in nearby. At first they lived in an old bus. They farmed the land, worked in construction, and built a synagogue. The first family moved in during Elul 5761 [late summer 2001] and at first lived in a greenhouse. Only in the middle of that winter were the first two mobile homes brought to the scene. Now one family and several single people live there.

Mitzpeh Danny: The mitzpeh is located at Ma'aleh Michmash and formally defined as a neighborhood of the settlement, connected to it, though it seeks full independence. The settlement was built as a result of a terrorist incursion to Ma'aleh Michmash, where Danny Fry was killed at his home. The residents of Ma'aleh

Michmash set up an observation post on a neighboring hill that overlooks the entire land of Binyamin. The day of the signing of the 1998 Wye River Accord, two mobile homes were moved to the site. Itzik Sapir, a resident of Ma'aleh Michmash, moved in and lived there for six months until he was joined by his comrade Shimon Ricklin, also from Ma'aleh Michmash. Now five families and 10 singles make it their home.

Kerem Atzmona Outpost (Gaza District): 500 dunam (about 125 acres) that a decade ago was covered with a vineyard. In the summer of 2000, a group of young, second-generation Atzmona residents moved in and started a summer camp in the vineyard area. That same summer, a yeshiva was established. At the end of the summer, the Alperets of Atzmona—two parents and six children—were sent to live there. They lived in a freight container for a month. When the intifada broke out they were asked to leave, but they had already put down roots and refused to go. At the height of the intifada, despite the attacks and mortars, five mobile homes arrived in full ceremony on Tu B'Shvat, February 2001. Since then the council has added another nine mobile homes and it encourages more people to move in.

The Gush Katif site says that in many cases, like that of Kerem Atzmona, the Housing Ministry and Jewish Agency help the Amana settlement movement and the regional councils to expand the illegal settlements. The latest issue of *Katifon*, the Gaza settlers' newsletter, reports that a new access road has been built to Kerem Atzmona and an urban plan has been drawn up to start permanent housing construction at the outpost.

Referring to Shirat Hayam, another blatantly illegal outpost, *Katifon* says the settlement has "already budgeted construction of housing units, electrical infrastructure, fencing, and general public infrastructure." (The first stage is six public housing units at an overall cost of NIS 2.4 million [\$437,500] from public coffers. The Housing Ministry has already invited a group of contractors to visit the site. The ministry promised them the next stage will include thirty housing units.)

Chairman of the Gaza District Regional Council, Avner Shimoni, writes in the newsletter, "Gush Katif will continue to grow, expand, and prosper." According to all the evidence, such as the appointment of Effi Eitam as housing minister, Shimoni will be able to keep his promise. And why not? Shirat Hayam could offer unemployed people in the south free housing, free electricity, free water, and a nearly tax-free salary in a state-subsidized factory.

GRABBING THE HILLTOPS: VIEWS OF JABAL ABU GHUNAYM

The following photos, courtesy of the Applied Research Institute Jerusalem (ARIJ), show Jabal Abu Ghunaym in East Jerusalem in March 1997, before the construction of Har Homa settlement began, and in January 2003. In early 1997, Jabal Abu Ghunaym was one of the last undeveloped tracts between Abu Dis and Bethlehem, and was considered the prime location for a Palestinian capital under the 1996 Beilin-Abu Mazin plan recommending expanding Jerusalem's boundaries so as to contain the capitals of both Israel (Yerushalayim) and Palestine (al-Quds) (see Doc. C3 in JPS 101). But in February 1997, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu approved construction of 6,500 housing units for 30,000 Jewish settlers on the site. Although the United States criticized Netanyahu's decision as "unhelpful" to the peace process, it vetoed a UN Security Council resolution condemning the plan on 7 March 1997. Netanyahu vowed to move forward—a primary factor causing the Palestinian Authority to suspend negotiations with Israel temporarily on 9 March (see Peace Monitor in JPS 104). Construction at Har Homa began on 18 March and continues today, with the aim of housing up to 40,000 settlers.



Jabal Abu Ghunaym, March 1997.



Jabal Abu Ghunaym, January 2003.

PALESTINIANS PAYING THE PRICE FOR SETTLEMENT EXPANSION

From Settlement Report, *January–February 2003*.

The notion that Israel's expanding settlement enterprise can proceed without harming Palestinians or infringing on their patrimony is as old as the Zionist movement itself. If the slogan "a land without a people for a people without a land" proved successful in mobilizing generations of Jews to come and settle Palestine, it was from the outset, and remains today, a notion at odds with the reality on the ground.

Former Prime Minister Ehud Barak presided over the most extensive expansion of settlements and their lands in almost a decade, in part because he underestimated the continuing power of settlement to "create facts on the ground" that Palestinians would find insufferable. Today, Barak and his plan to evacuate some settlements have passed from the scene, and the many new settlements that he founded but claimed could be removed as part of an agreement with the Palestinians remain.

Current Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, a fighter for Jewish sovereignty throughout

Palestine since his youth, understands far more than his contemporaries the centrality of settlement as an instrument to define the still-unfinished map of the State of Israel. He has always known that settlements are the spearhead of Israel's effort to deny Palestinian sovereignty and independence, and his efforts for more than a generation have been dedicated to realizing this unwavering conviction.

When the settlement enterprise was in its infancy in the early years after Israel's conquest of the occupied territories in June 1967, proponents often argued that neither Palestinians nor their lands were at risk from Israeli settlement plans. It was also argued that settlements were an instrument of peace, because the consequences of settlement expansion would force Palestinians to make peace on Israel's terms, securing their diminishing patrimony in order to contain Israeli expansion. Palestinians always knew these mutually contradictory claims to be false, the product of willful ignorance, religious fanaticism, or deliberate hypocrisy. The architects of settlement, like the Palestinians, have no illusions. Each understands that settlement expansion threatens an honorable Palestinian existence in the occupied territories. As settlements and their lands have expanded, so too has their destructive impact on the everyday lives of Palestinians.

For the settlement in Hebron, since its inception in April 1968, the watchword has been to remake Hebron, a community of 100,000 Palestinians, into a Jewish city and to make life in the city so unbearable for Palestinians that they leave. This intention is known to anyone who has spent time among its 400 settlers. Certainly Israel's political and security establishment is under no illusion that Hebron's settlers have a more benign objective. Both are complicit in the incremental destruction of Hebron as a living and viable Palestinian city.

One hundred Palestinian businessmen and shopkeepers with the misfortune to conduct their livelihood near the Avraham Avenu settlement in Hebron were forced to close their doors in mid-2002 "in order to create a buffer zone between the Hebron settlers and the Palestinian population," reported *Ha'Aretz*, after the brutal killing of an infant whose parents live in the settlement. Two hundred Palestinian families have been impoverished by the transformation of two commercial markets into closed military zones—"closed to the Palestinian proprietors

but not to the settlers who break into the stores, steal merchandise, and vandalize equipment. There are twenty-one detailed complaints from store owners, but only in a few cases have the investigations developed into indictments."

"Army officers declare vast tracts 'closed military zones,'" writes Israeli attorney Shlomo Leker, who represents the Hebron businessmen. "The suffering of the civilian Palestinian population is usually explained by the need to "gain security" for the settlers who have chosen to set up outposts in Palestinian population centers in the West Bank. At this level of friction . . . there are gross violations of the directives of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which are supposed to protect the civilian [Palestinian] population in an occupied territory. These violations are defined as war crimes in international law."

Israel acknowledges that the security of Hebron's settlers and the livelihoods of the tens of thousands of Palestinians residing around them are incompatible. "The security needs are still valid and outweigh the other considerations in this issue," writes attorney Udit Corinaldi-Sirkis from the State Prosecutor's Office, adding "it is likely that it will be possible to open the stores in the market if the Jewish residents are evacuated from the wholesale market."

But the record of Israeli settlements in Hebron does not leave any hope for the settlers' departure from the market nor in the economic rehabilitation of Palestinians pauperized as a consequence of their presence. Hebron is not the exception but rather a metaphor for the poisonous relationship between Palestinians and Israelis in the occupied territories. It signifies the depth to which relations can descend when settlers abandon all pretense about their objective and Palestinian forbearance turns into resignation, despair, and violence.

Recently Michael Ben Yair penned a bitter indictment in *Ha'Aretz*: "The Six-Day War was forced on us; but the war's seventh day, which began on June 12, 1967, continues to this day and is the product of our choice. We enthusiastically chose to become a colonialist society, ignoring international treaties, expropriating lands, transferring settlers from Israel to the occupied territories, engaging in theft, and finding justifications for all this."

Yair's observations ring true in Hebron no less than in Shilo, near Nablus, in Beit El outside Ramallah, and Ganei Tal in Gaza. The scores of settlements Israel has estab-

lished in the last thirty-five years do not simply complicate Palestinian life. The system of Israeli rule established in the wake of the destruction of the Palestinian Authority, in large part to assure settlers' ability to continue a "normal life," poses an existential threat to it.

Yair was attorney general during Yitzhak Rabin's last government, a party, like its predecessors and successors, to the transgressions he describes. The Oslo years did not bring an end to such measures—an important reason, now recognized by many, for the popular Palestinian disenchantment with diplomacy that erupted in September 2000.

The 15 November 2002 death of a squad of Israeli soldiers sent to guard Hebron's settlers has occasioned another round in this bitter, virulent history. The Sharon government is resurrecting the prime minister's 1998 proposal to establish a residential link along the 1.5 km route between Kiryat Arba and Hebron's Tomb of the Patriarchs. Along the first 700 meters, the IDF has already uprooted an olive orchard and demolished three houses. Along the remainder of the route, orders have been issued for the demolition of fifteen Palestinian houses to enable the construction of a \$1 million road, a project that has the support of Israel's Ministry of Tourism. Awaiting approval is Sharon's plan for 1,000 new dwelling units along the route.

"The army will avenge and we will build," said the spokesman of the Jewish settlement in Hebron, encapsulating the continuing story of Israeli rule in the occupied territories.

NEW BUFFER ZONES PERMIT DE FACTO ANNEXATION

SETTLERS REFUSE TO PROMISE NOT TO EXPAND INTO NEW SECURITY ZONES

From Settlement Report, March–April 2003.

The elected officials of each settlement in the West Bank have been asked by Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein to sign a statement promising that they will not expand construction into the new security zones being created around every settlement. Some leaders are refusing to make such a commitment. They argue that in many cases, the land inside the new perimeter is within the master plan boundaries for the settlement, and by signing such an agreement, settlements might compromise their ability to ex-

pand into territory for which they have statutory planning authority.

Palestinians who find that their lands or travel routes are affected by the new annexation are to be assured use of these lands "after they pass a security check," according to Rubinstein. Israel is prepared to pay compensation to landowners whose property is expropriated for construction of security fences.

This expansion of settlement-controlled areas is being taken because of the increased incidence of Palestinian attacks on settlements. Extensive land-clearing operations around Gaza settlements have been underway for some time.

Rubinstein has determined that "existing security circumstances leave no choice but to permit in principle the establishment of security zones around settlements." In more than 150 settlements in the West Bank, new electronic fences are to be constructed at a distance 400 meters from the existing perimeter. The cost of the project is estimated at \$200 million.

Budgetary restraints promise to stretch completion of the project over many months. In the meantime, such settlements as Karme Tsur, where two settlers were killed by a Palestinian intruder, have decided to improve the existing security perimeter by deploying concussion grenades connected by trip wires along its length. Residents of the Jordan Valley settlement of Ma'ale Ephraim suggested to Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz that they plant illumination mines around the existing fence. The IDF remains opposed to such "nonselective" measures and the casualties that they might produce.

There are also calls to create "sterile areas" along highways where attacks on settlers have occurred. The Ofra-Shilo-Ma'ale Levona area east of Ramallah is one such location. Binyamin Regional Council head Pinchas Wallerstein supports the creation of such a zone 100 to 150 meters wide on both sides of the main highway. "Whoever enters that zone must be considered suspicious," Wallerstein explained. "The Arab residents will simply have to pay the price of not traveling in this area."

FENCE PROPOSAL FIRES CONTROVERSY AMONG SETTLER LEADERS

The following article by Nadav Shragai ran in Ha'Aretz on 4 February 2003.

An alternative separation fence route, drafted by some West Bank council heads, is

the focus of a raging controversy among settler leaders.

The fence route map, presented by some leaders of the YESHA council of settlements to Central Command commander Moshe Kaplinsky and Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, leaves dozens of settlements on the west side of the fence. It annexes 110,000 Palestinians, in contrast to the few thousands already living on the western side of the separation fence route approved by the government, running from Jenin in the north to the Sha'arei Tikva area.

The route presented by the settlers, defined as a security line, in fact ignores the partial (northern) route which the government has approved, despite the fact that only a small part of the planned fences along that route have already been built.

The route is marked by a long winding line east of the central settlement bloc of west Samaria, inhabited by some 38,000 settlers: Shavei Shomron, Keddumim, Karnei Shomron, Ma'ale Shomron, Emmanuel, Yakir, Nofim, Revava, Kiryat Netafim, Ariel, Aley Zahav, Pdu'el, and Bet Arye.

In the west Binyamin region, the settlers' proposed route also deviates significantly from the route which the government has not yet approved. Here, the emphasis is on the addition of extensive territory, more than on additional population.

The government's planned fence passes north of Givat Ze'ev and Road 45 and east of the settlements Hashmona'im, Mod'in Ilit, Nili, Naale, Ofarim, and Bet Arye. The settlers' proposal draws the fence's line east of the west Binyamin settlements, which inhabit some 6,000. These settlements are Dolev, Talmon, Neria, Harsha, Nachliel, Neve Tzof, and Ateret. Between the government and settlers' routes are thirteen Palestinian villages with some 20,000 people living in them.

The secretaries of the settlements in the west Binyamin bloc write in an appendix to the map that "the importance of bringing the west Binyamin bloc settlements 'into the fence' is worth 'the price.'" They say it is a "small addition" compared to the 200,000 Palestinians included in the area of the Jerusalem Envelope road (not including 100,000 east Jerusalem residents).

The appendix says the west Binyamin settlements "are high and dominate their surroundings well. They have great importance in expanding the Jerusalem corridor, to defend the Dan region hinterland, to protect the air space of Ben-Gurion Airport, and to

prevent [the Palestinians] from pumping up underground water from the Yarkon-Taninim basin."

The settlers' southern route encircles Bethlehem from the north, turns southeast to include most of the Gush Etzion settlements in the Israeli side, and surrounds the A and B areas south of Mount Hebron. This route leaves west of the fence most settlements of the south of Mount Hebron, such as Telem, Adora, Negohot, Otniel, Susia, Ma'on, and Carmel. On the other hand, all the settlements of east Gush Etzion remain east of the fence, including Kfar Eldad, Tekoa, Nokdim, and Ma'ale Amos.

The settlers' route also leaves east of the fence the settlements of the Nablus area mountainside such as Elon Moreh, Itamar, Brakha, and Yitzhar, as well as the settlements well inside the Binyamin area—Shilo, Shvut Rachel, Ma'ale Levona, Rachelim, and even Ofra. Some north West Bank settlements also remain east of the fence. These are Einav, Sanur, Homesh, Hermesh, and Mevo Dotan.

The settlers' separation route creates a small corridor north of the West Bank, which brings the Ganim-Qadim settlements into the Israeli side of the fence. The Shaked-Reihan settlement bloc is already included within the fence route approved by the defense establishment. In the region of Avnei Hefetz and Sal'it, the defense establishment agreed to the YESHA council's request and created corridors to include both those settlements.

The settlers' leaders are at odds over the idea of building the fence at all. Spearheading the objectors is Keddumim council head Daniella Weiss, who opposes setting up fences in principle and regards them as a kind of ghetto and a clear sign of weakness, which will only encourage terrorism. Weiss says if fences are to be put up at all, it should be around the Palestinian population, rather than the Jewish one. However, most of the settler council heads support drawing a map for the separation fence. They point out that this is not a political line but a security one.

"The Palestinians, the United States, and the Left will never agree to this route. It is convenient to them and to us, precisely because there is no agreement on it. Neither of us define it as a political line, but as a security line subject to future changes," they said.

Binyamin regional council head, Pinhas Wallerstein, who also supports presenting a separation fence route, said recently that the

guiding concept behind the settlers' proposed route is "maximum Jewish population, minimum Arab population, and maximum territory."

Wallerstein says this route is intended to prevent the damage which a fence along the Green Line would cause. Other council heads who support the draft argue that it is necessary to prevent building the government's separation fence, as it might turn into a political border in the future.

Mofaz's adviser in settlement affairs, Col. Ron Shechner (res.), former south Mt. Hebron council head, is helping the settler heads to promote their fence proposal. The proposals presented by some council heads are to be discussed in the next few weeks. Some settlers say that since Mofaz was appointed defense minister, the defense establishment is more open to their ideas, including the separation fence route. They said they hope at least some of their suggestions are accepted.