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Settlement Monitor

Source: *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Fall 2003), pp. 139-147

Published by: [University of California Press](#) on behalf of the [Institute for Palestine Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jps.2003.33.1.139>

Accessed: 26/02/2015 15:03

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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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SHARON GOVERNMENT'S SEPARATION PLAN DEFINES PALESTINE'S PROVISIONAL BORDERS

From Settlement Report, July–August 2003.

The territorial division of historical Palestine has entered its most decisive stage since Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in June 1967. Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon is the prime instigator of this process, against which the vaunted road map, a creature of multilateral diplomacy now championed by the Bush administration, struggles to remain relevant.

In a variety of roles over the last generation, Sharon has labored to undermine an Israeli withdrawal to the June 1967 lines. He has masterminded the settlement map that is the template of the "separation zone"—popularly known as the "fence" or the "wall"—that is fast dividing the occupied territories between Israel and an ersatz Palestine—the "state with provisional borders" whose creation is called for in the road map.

"The map of the fence is the same map I saw during every visit Arik [Sharon] made here [Ariel] since 1978," explained Ron Nachman, mayor of the settlement of Ariel, near Nablus. "He told me that he's been thinking about it since 1973."

Sharon has not only been thinking of this map, he has been busy fashioning it on the ground. His long-held vision of the territorial division of Palestine is now well on its way to being realized. He views the border now taking shape in the West Bank—Gaza's separation into Israeli and Palestinian enclaves on the same model is all but complete—as his historical contribution, on par with David Ben-Gurion's creation of the state in 1948 and Menachem Begin's peace treaty with Egypt in 1979, to the consolidation of Israeli hegemony over the Land of Israel.

The map now being carved out in the hills and plains of the West Bank confirms most but not all of Sharon's historical strategic objectives: Israel retains strategic command over the entire area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea;

Journal of Palestine Studies XXXIII, no. 1 (Fall 2003), pp. 139–147.
ISSN: 0377-919X; online ISSN: 1533-8614.
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Journals Division, 2000 Center St., Ste. 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223.

Arab populations in Jordan and Egypt are separated from their brethren in Palestine by Israeli-controlled or settled territory; Palestinians are separated from each other and from Palestinian citizens of Israel by borders based upon settlement blocs; and territorial continuity is established in the Palestinian areas of the West Bank and Gaza by a small number of bridges or tunnels and in the Jerusalem area by a ring road.

Sharon is under no illusion that such a prescription will end the conflict. He is convinced that this will only come about when Palestinians surrender completely. In the meantime, he is determined to realize his ambition of establishing the territorial and political parameters for the "long-term interim agreement" that he has championed for many years. As with Israeli efforts during the Oslo era to design a model for ruling the territories, Sharon aims at an internationally recognized agreement—*pace* the road map—with acknowledged Palestinian leaders, not as a prescription for ending the conflict but as a way to manage it, as Israel has done, albeit at increasing cost, for almost thirty years.

The one concession Sharon is prepared to make to his long-held beliefs, and the one that has so shocked his comrades in the settlement movement, is his prescription for Palestinian statehood as a reluctant accommodation to the Palestinian's unsailable demographic lead in the populated heartland of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In contrast to his views as a settlement visionary in 1976 and to those held by many settler leaders today, Sharon is now prepared to pay a price in West Bank and Gaza territory—the 50 percent of the former and 80 percent of the latter that will comprise the new, nominally sovereign state of Palestine—to protect a Jewish majority in Greater Israel.

The division of Palestine according to this prescription is the synergistic outcome of a number of factors: principally Israel's system of settlements and roads, now as always the key elements of Israel's intention to preempt Palestinian control; the settlement "outpost" phenomenon, which aims in part at capturing territory in West Bank areas where the trajectory of the emerging border is still open to internal Israeli debate; and the "fence," which is more accurately described as a border-like separation barrier.

The Israeli preference for the creation of a physical border as a solution to its

occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip is of relatively recent vintage. Since June 1967, Israeli proponents and opponents of the occupation have supported the erasure of the physical border and encouraged a wide range of contacts between the two peoples.

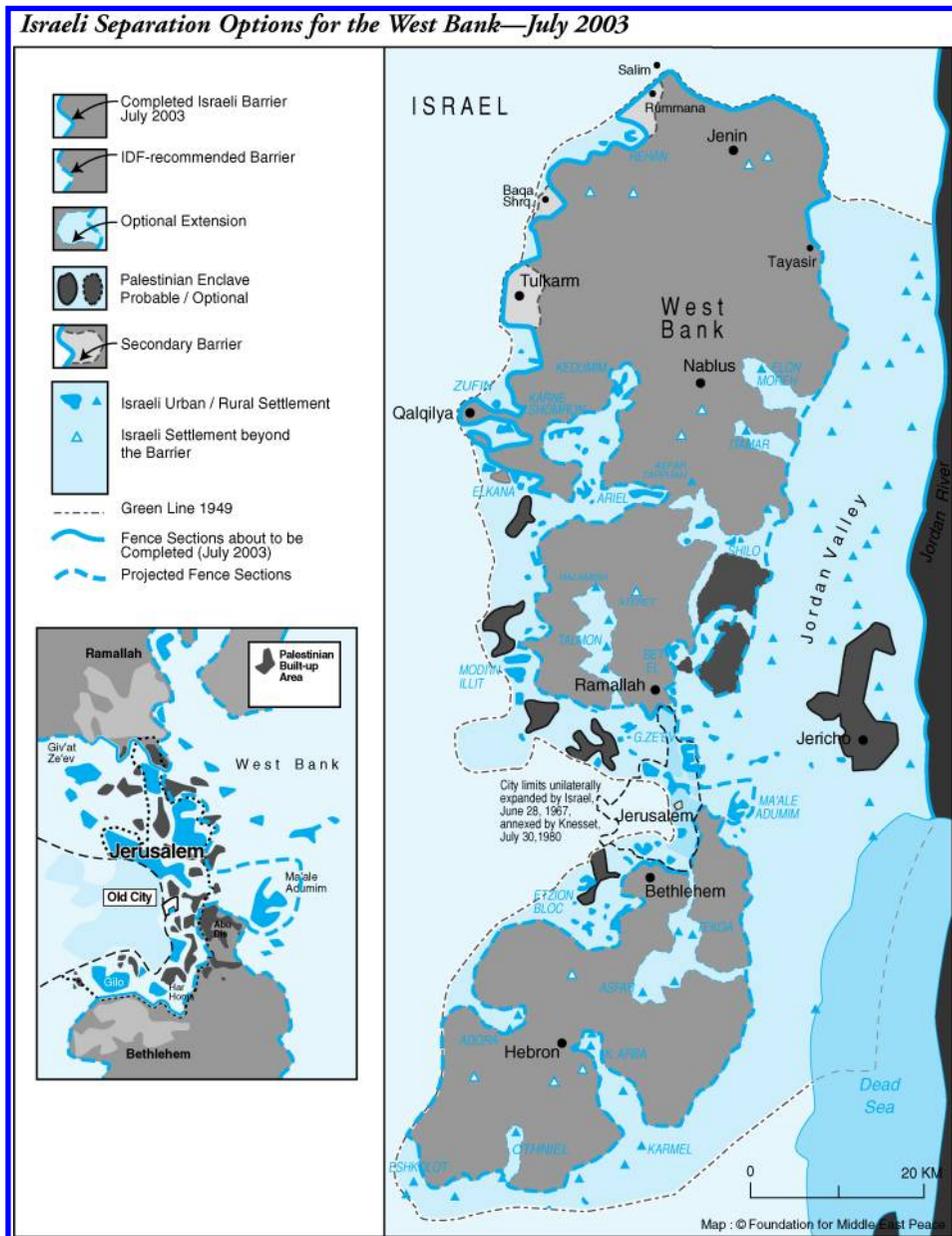
In the new era commencing with the 1991 Gulf War, this conventional wisdom was turned on its head. Since the construction of a short wall along the Green Line in 1995, Israeli public opinion has successfully demanded the creation of a physical barrier that it hopes will ensure its security, if not necessarily demarcate a political border.

Sharon has always been adept at taking an accurate measure of the forces engaged on an issue and turning them to his own purpose. He was initially opposed to a 300-km-long security zone more or less along the 1967 Green Line border, as were most members of the country's political and security establishment. Like Sharon, they saw the project as the result of the Israeli public's search for a simplistic answer to Palestinian attacks, a solution they considered expensive, unwieldy, and ineffective. Yet Sharon embraced the public demand to be rid of Palestinians even as he transformed it to his own purpose.

Following a series of decisions (some of which have been implemented and others of which are imminent) bolstered by effective lobbying from the settlement movement, the trajectory of the security barriers has ballooned to almost 600 km along routes on either side of the 45 to 50 percent of the West Bank heartland, which together with 70 to 80 percent of the Gaza Strip, Israel has reserved for Palestine.

Pragmatic elements in the settlement movement have understood, like Sharon, that having lost the battle over the fence, their best option was to influence its route. Pinchas Wallerstein, a leader of the YESHA council, explained their views as follows: "Maximum Jewish population, with minimum Arab population, over maximum area, and all as part of an effort to correct losses that the fence along the Green Line will bring about."

The changing route of the separation zone exemplifies the success of the settlers' campaign and its transformation under Sharon's guidance from a security measure to a far-reaching political fait accompli. Among the important way stations are Sharon's decision soon after construction commenced in August 2002 to extend the



fence to the east of the settlement of Alfe Menashe, followed by an IDF recommendation in early 2003, initiated by settlers and supported publicly by Sharon in mid-May, to include the Ariel “finger,” 20 km from the Green Line, adding 32,000 settlers and 7,000 Palestinians to the 20,000 Israelis and 11,500 Palestinians already included west of the zone.

On 23 March, Sharon announced his intention to construct a security zone along

the mountain ridge west of the Jordan Valley, at once almost doubling the physical distance and cost of the project, now estimated at 580 km and more than \$1 billion. Two months later Sharon declared that the Beit El and Shilo settlements, west of the Alon Road and commanding Route 60, a vital transportation artery for Palestinians between Nablus and Ramallah, would not be evacuated, suggesting that the path of the eastern separation zone would also

include “fingers” reaching west of the Alon Road to the settlements of Eli, Elon Moreh, Itamar, Ofra, and Shilo south of Jerusalem to Kiryat Arba/Hebron, Nokdim, and Tekoa.

Still undecided is the route in the region west of Ramallah, where settlers are lobbying for the inclusion of the Talmon bloc of settlements. The route preferred by settlers is not inconsistent with the principle established by the inclusion of Ariel and Alfe Menashe. It would add six settlements with a population of 4,500 to the ten settlements with a population of 30,000 included in a less expansive option. Adoption of the more expansive option would add thirteen Palestinian villages with a population of 24,000 to 41,000 Palestinians residing west of the principal separation barrier in this region.

The route south to Jerusalem and along the eastern and western perimeters of the Bethlehem-Hebron region is only tentatively outlined, with the exception of 22 km in the north and south of Jerusalem, only 10 km of which is completed. The southern sector will include Bethlehem’s Rachel’s Tomb and surrounding Palestinian residential areas, as well as the main road into Bethlehem from Jerusalem, which now ends abruptly just north of town.

When finished in late 2004, the separation zones could leave on the “Israeli” side more than 50 percent of the West Bank and as many as 366,000 Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Palestinians, in protests echoed by the international community, argue that the Sharon government is arbitrarily determining the borders of the Palestinian state called for in the road map. In response to such concerns, Sharon may concede the creation of a contiguous barrier in regions like Ariel, relying instead on a series of security perimeters encircling each settlement.

Notwithstanding such tactical modifications, Sharon is not prepared to abandon his long-held grand design nor to contemplate an international demand that would oblige him to do so.

THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN ROAD MAP: WHAT A SETTLEMENT FREEZE MEANS AND WHY IT MATTERS

Reproduced below are the executive summary and recommendations of a report by the International Crisis Group (ICG), which was released on 25 July 2003. The full report is available on ICG’s Web site at www.intl-crisis-group.org.

Settlement expansion in the Palestinian occupied territories is endangering the viability of the road map and, most importantly, of the two-state solution it contemplates and which forms the core of President Bush’s stated vision. Freezing settlements is not the road map’s only requirement and, to Israelis, may not appear as the central one. But unless action is urgently taken, there is a serious risk that Israeli steps will jeopardize any realistic prospect of a fair and sustainable territorial solution. The seriousness of President Bush and the wider international community about the objective of achieving a two-state solution must be matched by an equal commitment to halting the settlement enterprise that is jeopardizing it.

Israeli efforts to expand settlements are not new. But their cumulative impact, in particular a series of projects launched over the past few years, is inflicting grievous harm to Palestinian territorial integrity. These include efforts to consolidate and expand the presence of Jewish areas in and around Jerusalem, the erection of caravans and attendant infrastructure in what are euphemistically called “settlement outposts,” and the construction that is underway of the security (or separation) fence.

The history of Middle East diplomacy is replete with efforts to slow down or halt settlement expansion. All have failed. In every case, exceptions were allowed in response to seemingly reasonable Israeli requests (e.g., to bar only the establishment of “new” settlements or to accommodate “natural growth”); the exception ended up swallowing the rule, thereby not only making possible settlement growth but providing it with a U.S. imprimatur as well. It is important that this time the Quartet—and principally the United States—strictly define for Israel what it means by a settlement freeze and that the Israeli government be held to the high standard expressed unambiguously in the internationally endorsed road map.

In this endeavor, there is a conundrum. While the freeze demanded by Washington and its partners needs to be hermetic if it is to be meaningful, the failure of past efforts reflects something more than either lack of U.S. resolve or Israel’s ability to circumvent restrictions through agreed-upon exceptions. It reflects as well the practical and political difficulty faced by any Israeli government, including the most peace-minded, in implementing a genuine and airtight settlement freeze as part of an incremental,

confidence-building measure. The settlement enterprise has, by now, become an integral part of Israel's political, economic, social, and legal system. The informal system by which settlers and officials have entrenched the settlement project is harder to quantify; it also may be harder to undo.

Achieving a real, comprehensive freeze as demanded by the road map, in other words, will require a momentous effort. In all likelihood, it will be achieved only in the context of a diplomatic endgame in which the Israeli government and its people are engaged in a process designed to end the conflict with the Palestinians—and, therefore, to evacuate the vast majority of the settlements. Like the demand that the PA dismantle the armed infrastructure of Hamas or Islamic Jihad even at the cost of a difficult and potentially bloody internal struggle, the demand that Israel wholly freeze settlements is one that is difficult to be undertaken at the front-end of an ill-defined and uncertain journey.

As the experience of the Oslo years amply demonstrates, the way out of this dilemma is not to disregard the need for a genuine settlement freeze or to dilute its contents any more than it would be to disregard the need for genuine and serious Palestinian action on the security front. To allow settlement activity to proceed in the run-up to the endgame is to endanger the possibility of ever getting to that endgame. Rather, insistence on a real settlement freeze must remain a centerpiece of diplomatic efforts and of on-the-ground monitoring. Diplomatic and political pressure should be exerted to maximize Israel's adherence to it and publicly pinpoint any violations. In particular, the Quartet, with the U.S. front and center, should highlight those aspects that are most threatening to the viability of a future Palestinian state—e.g., the outposts, construction around Jerusalem and the central West Bank, and the location of the security fence.

Certain exceptions related to basic needs of settlers may be allowed but, unlike in past cases, the Quartet, acting through a joint committee with Israel that is under U.S. chairmanship, will need to define them narrowly, approve them on a case-by-case basis, and rigorously monitor compliance through on-the-ground and aerial surveillance.

While a gap between Israeli obligations and performance is to be anticipated initially, it too can serve a political purpose.

The difficulties entailed in implementing a genuine freeze will, one hopes, make it clear to the international community and to large segments of the Israeli public itself that, ultimately, the solution lies in a rapid evacuation of those Israeli settlements that will not be annexed by mutual agreement with the Palestinians. Such a solution would also help remove uncertainty among members of the settler community—both those in settlements that will become part of Israel through agreed border modifications and those who will return to Israel and seek compensation.

The road map, by espousing an incremental, step-by-step approach, multiplies along the way the obstacles it is designed to overcome. As the process unfolds, and as implementation problems become ever more apparent, the argument for rethinking and accelerating the current approach ought to gain resonance. As ICG has argued consistently for more than a year, by fleshing out rapidly the contours of a final agreement and leap-frogging the myriad steps called for in the road map, the United States and its Quartet partners would have a far better chance of achieving its ultimate objective.

Recommendations

To the Government of the United States and other Members of the Quartet:

1. Make clear to the government of Israel their insistence on a genuine settlement freeze in all territories occupied in 1967 that includes the following core elements:
 - a. dismantling all settlement outposts erected since March 2001, including all related infrastructure (e.g., electricity, water pipelines);
 - b. ending all demolition and confiscation of Palestinian land, homes, and property;
 - c. ceasing all construction of new settlements and, within existing settlements, all construction of settler bypass roads and settlement infrastructure, including other roads, water, and electricity;
 - d. revoking existing construction permits and prohibiting the issuing of new ones;
 - e. prohibiting all financial incentives and special budgetary support to settlers and settlements;

- f. limiting those powers devolved to local settlement authorities, in particular those related to expansion of settlements and facilities, incentives to settlers, and issuance of building permits; and
 - g. establishing the principle that the route of the proposed security fence be along the lines of 4 June 1967 ("the Green Line").
2. Make clear that the only exceptions that will be accepted to the prohibition on construction will be in the following four categories:
 - a. construction within the built-up areas of Jewish neighborhoods/settlements in East Jerusalem within the municipal boundaries, but precluding any land confiscation, any addition of new neighborhoods/settlements, and the establishment of any "mini-settlements" or single-dwelling settlements in Palestinian neighborhoods;
 - b. completion of certain housing units where construction is beyond the foundations stage and that will not further harm the prospects of a viable Palestinian state;
 - c. addition of certain vital public amenities (kindergarten, schools, playgrounds, etc.), in particular in settlements with high birth rates; and
 - d. repair of important services.
 3. Establish a joint Quartet-Israel committee under U.S. chairmanship to:
 - a. monitor compliance with the above and
 - b. review on a case-by-case basis, in a transparent and public manner, requests for exemptions to the above prohibitions in the four categories identified in recommendation 2.
 4. Contribute to Israeli-established funds designed to:
 - a. compensate Israeli contractors for economic losses incurred as a result of the freeze and
 - b. facilitate the voluntary relocation of settlers to pre-1967 Israel.
 5. Publicize any violation of these obligations.
 6. Make clear to the government of Israel that, should the Quartet conclude that it has failed to adhere to the settlement

freeze, it will consider accelerating the road map's stages and put forward its own more detailed vision of a final status agreement.

To the Government of Israel:

1. Publicly announce its intention to enforce a settlement freeze, rigorously adhere to the freeze as defined by the Quartet, and take all legislative and administrative steps necessary to enforce its implementation.
2. Cooperate with the U.S. chairman and the Quartet in the joint committee and, in particular:
 - a. provide it with all requested information concerning activity in the settlements and
 - b. facilitate ground and aerial monitoring that should be conducted by the United States on behalf of the Quartet.
3. Set up a fund designed to compensate Israelis harmed by the settlement freeze.
4. Redirect resources previously used to encourage Israelis to move to settlements so as to provide financial incentives for Israeli settlers desiring to relocate in areas of pre-1967 Israel.

REMOVING SETTLEMENT OUTPOSTS

The following article by Gush Shalom's Uri Avnery, entitled "The Best Show in Town," was published and distributed by Gush Shalom on 21 June 2003 and is available on their Web site at www.gush-shalom.org.

The most talented director could not have done better. It was a perfect show.

Television viewers all over the world saw heroic Israeli soldiers on their screens battling the fanatical settlers. Close-ups: faces twisted with passion, a soldier lying on a stretcher, a young woman crying in despair, children weeping, youngsters storming forward in fury, masses of people wrestling with each other. A battle of life and death.

There is no room for doubt: Ariel Sharon is leading a heroic fight against the settlers in order to fulfill his promise to remove "unauthorized" outposts, even "inhabited" ones. The old warrior is again facing a determined enemy without flinching.

The conclusion is self-evident, both in Israel and throughout the world: if such a tumultuous battle takes place for a tiny outpost inhabited by hardly a dozen people,

how can one expect Sharon to remove ninety outposts, as promised in the road map? If things look like that when he has to remove a handful of tents and one small stone building, how can one even dream of evacuating real settlements, where dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of families are living?

This must have impressed George Bush and his people. Unfortunately, it has not impressed me.

It makes me laugh.

In the last few years I have witnessed dozens of confrontations with the army. I know what they really look like.

The Israeli army has already demolished thousands of Palestinian homes in the occupied territories. This is how it goes: early in the morning, hundreds of soldiers surround the land. Behind them come the tanks and bulldozers, and the action starts. When despair drives the inhabitants to resist, the soldiers hit them with sticks, throw tear gas grenades, shoot rubber-coated metal bullets, and, if the resistance is stronger, live ammunition, too. Old people are thrown on the ground, women dragged along, young people handcuffed and pushed against the wall. After a few minutes, it's all over.

Well, they'll say, that's done to Arabs. They don't do this to Jews.

Wrong. They certainly do this to Jews. Depends who the Jews are.

I, for example, am a Jew. I have been attacked with tear gas five times so far. Once it was a special gas, and for a few moments I was afraid that I was going to choke to death.

During one of the blockades on Ramallah we decided to bring food to the beleaguered town. We were some three thousand Israeli peace activists, both Jews and Arabs. At the al-Ram checkpoint, north of Jerusalem, a line of policemen and soldiers stopped us. There was an exchange of insults and a lot of shouting. Suddenly we were showered with tear gas canisters. The thousands dispersed in panic, coughing and choking—some were trampled; one of our group, an 82-year-old Jew and kibbutznic, was injured.

I have witnessed demonstrations in which rubber-coated bullets were shot at Israeli citizens (generally Arabs). Once I was in the gas-filled rooms of a school at Umm al-Fahm in Israel.

If the army had really wanted to evacuate Mitzpe Yitzhar quickly and efficiently,

it would have used tear gas. The whole business would have been over in a few minutes. But then there would not have been dramatic pictures on TV, and George W. would have asked his friend Arik: "Hey, why don't you finish with all the outposts in a week?"

In other words, this was a well-produced show for TV.

A few days before, the leaders of the settlers met with Ariel Sharon. As they left and faced the cameras they uttered dark threats, but anyone who knows these people and looked at their faces on TV could see that there were no strong emotions at work. Of course, the "YESHA rabbis" (YESHA is settlerese for the West Bank), a group of bearded political functionaries, called on the soldiers to disobey orders and requested the LORD and the messiah to come to their help, but even they lacked real passion.

Why? Because all of them knew that everything had been agreed in advance. The army chiefs and the leaders of the settlers, comrades and partners for a long time, sat together and decided what would happen and, more importantly, what would not happen: no sudden attack; no efforts to prevent thousands of young people from reaching the place well in advance; no use of sticks, water cannon, tear gas, rubber-coated bullets, or any other means beyond the use of bare hands. The soldiers would not wear helmets nor be equipped with shields. The settlers would shout and push but would not hit the soldiers in earnest. The whole show would be less violent than a normal scuffle with British soccer hooligans, but would look on TV like a desperate battle between titanic forces.

Ariel Sharon has some experience with this kind of thing. A dozen years ago he directed a similar show when, following the peace treaty with Egypt, he was ordered by Prime Minister Menahem Begin to evacuate the town of Yamit in the northern Sinai Peninsula. At the time, Sharon was minister of defense. And who was one of the leaders of the dramatic resistance? Tshai Hanegbi, now the minister in charge of the police.

All the arms of the establishment cooperated this week in the big show. The media devoted many hours to the "battle." Dozens of settlers were invited to the studios and talked endlessly—while, as far as I saw, not a single person belonging to the active peace camp was called to the microphone.

The courts, too, did their duty: the handful of settlers that were arrested for resisting violently were sent home after spending a day or two in jail. The courts, who never show any mercy when Arabs appear before them, treated the fanatical settlers like erring sons.

The whole comedy would have been funny, if it did not concern a very serious problem. Such an "outpost" looks like a harmless cluster of mobile homes on top of a god-forsaken hill, but it is far from being innocuous. It is a symptom of a cancerous growth. Not for nothing did Ariel Sharon—the very same Sharon—call upon the settlers a few years ago to take control of all the hills of "Judea and Samaria."

The disease develops like this: a group of rowdies occupies a hilltop, some miles from an established settlement, and puts a mobile home there. After some time, the "outpost" already consists of a number of mobile homes. A generator and a water tower are brought in. Women with babies appear on the scene. A fence is set up. The army sends some units to defend them. They declare that for security reasons, Palestinians are not allowed to come near, in order to prevent them from spying and preparing an attack. The security zone becomes bigger and bigger. The inhabitants of the neighboring Palestinian villages cannot reach some of their orchards and fields any more. If someone tries, he is liable to be shot. Every settler has a weapon, and he has nothing to fear from the law if he uses it against a suspicious Arab. All Arabs are suspicious, of course.

As it so happens, I have some experience with Mitzpe Yitzhak, the particular outpost that figured in this week's show. Some months ago we were called by the inhabitants of the Palestinian village of Habala to help them pick their olives in a grove near this "outpost." When the pickers came near to the outpost, the settlers opened fire. An Israeli in our group was wounded when a bullet struck a rock at his feet.

The "unauthorized" outposts were in fact established systematically, with the help of the army and according to its planning. When several outposts take root in a region, the Palestinian villages are choked between them. Their life becomes hell. The settlers and officers clearly hope that in the end they will give up and clear out.

Will Sharon really evacuate them by the dozens? That depends, of course, on his

friend George W. If the *budna* (truce) between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas is achieved, Bush may perhaps exert serious pressure on Sharon. When I visited Yasir Arafat yesterday, he seemed to be cautiously optimistic. But he, too, said that there are no more than four months left for getting things moving: starting from November, the American president will be busy getting himself reelected.

This means that Sharon has only to produce a few more shows of this sort for television, and then he and the settlers will be able to breathe freely once again.

SETTLEMENT EXPANSION CONTINUES

THE ROUTE TO SETTLEMENT EXPANSION: 11,000 NEW UNITS PLANNED

From Settlement Report, July–August 2003.

Israel's national market for housing is in an unprecedented recession. Housing sales throughout Israel in 2002 reached only 100,000 units, a reduction of almost 20 percent from the height of the market in the mid-1990s. This decline is also apparent in most settlements, where security concerns related to the continuing intifada are an additional factor depressing demand.

Nevertheless, one day after Prime Minister Ariel Sharon described Israel's rule over the West Bank and Gaza Strip as an "occupation that cannot continue indefinitely," the Ministry of Housing revealed plans for the construction of 11,806 dwelling units in settlements, including 3,271 in Ariel; 3,200 in Beitar Ilit; 1,512 in Giva Benjamin; 1,054 in Givat Ze'ev; and 4,281 in Ma'ale Adumim. The necessary administrative approvals for this continuing expansion are expected to be finalized by year's end. In the meantime, construction is expected to commence in coming months on 2,000 new units.

The settler population (excluding East Jerusalem) has increased by 5,000 since the beginning of 2003 to 231,000.

DIZZYING GROWTH SEEN IN HAREDI BEITAR ILIT ON THE WEST BANK

The following article by Nadav Shragai ran in Ha'Aretz on 7 July 2003.

A demographic revolution is under way in the West Bank. In about three years, one of the two large Haredi [ultra-Orthodox] towns in the West Bank, Beitar Ilit and Mod'in Ilit, will assume the title of "the

largest Jewish city in the territories," surrendered from the current holder, Ma'ale Adumim.

The Haredim are currently a quarter of the Jewish population in the territories, and in several years, they will constitute a full third of the settler population. While Mod'in Ilit is on the Green Line, Beitar Ilit, situated between Gush Etzion and Jerusalem, is a full-fledged settlement whose dizzying rate of growth is unparalleled elsewhere in Israel.

The numbers speak for themselves. In 1996, Beitar Ilit comprised 5,000 people and 1,200 households. Today it has a population of 24,000 and 4,700 households.

Each year there are 1,700 newborns in Beitar Ilit, and young couples settle in 500 new apartments. The immediate impact of these figures is that there is an annual increase of 3,000 to 3,500 new residents in the town.

The rate of construction in Beitar Ilit forecasts a faster rate of growth, with 3,000 homes in various stages of completion. Some 700 of them are expected to be occupied in the coming year. The final planned construction in Beitar Ilit spreads over 4,300 dunams and includes 10,000 homes. According to estimates, the city of Beitar Ilit will eventually number 100,000 residents.

Beitar Ilit is the youngest town in Israel with children comprising 63 percent of its population. In all other Jewish communities in Israel, on average, children comprise just 34 percent, and 50 percent in Arab communities. In Beitar Ilit, the "elderly" range between twenty-three and thirty-three years of age.

The vast majority of the population in Beitar Ilit originated in Jerusalem. Only 20 percent come from other parts of Israel, and a mere 10 percent are new immigrants. The cost of a three-bedroom apartment there costs between \$90,000 to \$100,000,

with approximately an additional \$25,000 for each extra room.

Demographers are relieved that the majority of those moving to Beitar Ilit are Haredim from Jerusalem. The average ultra-Orthodox family in Jerusalem has six to eight children, and there is no viable way of providing housing for them within the capital's confines. In any case, the housing costs in Jerusalem are higher by 30 to 35 percent than those in Beitar Ilit or Mod'in Ilit. Hence, Beitar Ilit became a refuge for young Haredi couples from Jerusalem who are seeking a place with reasonable housing costs. It should also be noted that most of the population in Beitar Ilit works: the work force numbers 9,000 persons, of whom 60 percent work. An additional 1,200 are yeshiva students, and the rest are unemployed.

Economically, the population stands on the lowest end of the scale. Along with nine other Arab and bedouin towns, it is the only Jewish town with such levels of poverty. According to the data of the Central Bureau of Statistics, the number of private vehicles per 1,000 persons is the lowest in Israel at 42.

Still, the municipal budget has remained in the black for years now, and the interior minister's prize for proper financial management has been granted to the city six times. Mayor Yitzhak Pindrus says that from an economic point of view, the city operates differently from the rest of the country: "We live on what we have, not on what we don't have." For example, on average, each municipality employs one worker per 100 residents, but Beitar Ilit has on its payroll one worker per 250 residents.

The biggest problem facing the city is an acute shortage of classrooms. There are 10,000 children aged 3 to 13, but there are only 140 classrooms; another 170 more operate in caravans. There is also a shortage of synagogues.