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JOURNALS + DIGITAL PUBLISHING



Settlement Monitor

Author(s): Geoffrey Aronson

Source: *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Spring 2008), pp. 164-172

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

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jps.2008.37.3.164>

Accessed: 26/02/2015 13:20

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SETTLEMENT MONITOR

EDITED BY GEOFFREY ARONSON

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

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A GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED: NEGOTIATIONS AFTER ANNAPOLIS

Negotiations have resumed to resolve the "core issues" of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians—borders and settlements, Palestinian refugees, and the status and territorial division of Jerusalem. Palestinian and Israeli negotiating delegations have been created, a framework for addressing both final status issues and those related to obligations set out in the road map has been established, and the international community has committed to unprecedented levels of financial support for Palestinian Authority (PA) Chairman Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad.

Most international attention is focused on this complex and variegated diplomatic framework, which for the first time in seven years designates Israelis and Palestinians as the central players in the diplomatic process. The experience of diplomatic efforts during the Oslo years, as well as more re-

cent developments, however, suggests that current negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians will be less decisive than the debate among Israelis that such diplomacy fosters, or the dialogue that it sparks between Washington and Jerusalem.

Soon after the announcement of Israel's intention to evacuate the Gaza Strip, for example, President George W. Bush, in a 14 April 2004 letter to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon (see the Special Documents section of *JPS* 132) stated the following:

As part of a final peace settlement, Israel must have secure and recognized borders, which should emerge from negotiations between the parties in accordance with UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338. *In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli populations centers [settlements], it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949, and all previous efforts to negotiate a two-state solution have reached the same conclusion. It is realistic to expect that any final status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities. (Emphasis added.)*

Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XXXVII, No. 3 (Spring 2008), pp. 164–172, ISSN 0377-919X, electronic ISSN 1533-8614. © 2008 by the Institute for Palestine Studies. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, at <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintInfo.asp>. DOI: [jps.2008.XXXVII.3.164](https://doi.org/10.1215/0377919X-2008-003).

Sharon chose not to negotiate with Palestinians with respect to his historic decision to evacuate settlements in the Gaza Strip, but he choreographed his policy to wrest maximum advantage from the United States. Notwithstanding the lack of geographic clarity in Bush's April 2004 statement, the letter signified U.S. support for Israel's policy of "creating facts on the ground," contradicting decades of American opposition (and abrogating U.S. commitments to international treaties, such as the Fourth Geneva Convention, indicating that the United States now officially affirms Israel's unique view on the status of the occupied territories as being excepted from the Convention) and at the very moment when Sharon was establishing the critical precedent of *evacuating* settlements.

Palestinian leader Ghassan Khatib noted at the time that

... [Bush's] assurances justify and consequently encourage right-wing Israeli extremists to proceed with their settlement expansion advocacy, which will ultimately and ironically bring about the final death of Bush's "vision" of two states living side by side. Bush's concurrence, included in his letter to Sharon, that the borders contained in a final agreement be modified to accommodate Israel's settlements is certainly going to encourage settlement expansion and further strengthen the hand of Israeli settlers. Thirty-five years of illegal settlement expansion have now been recognized and legitimated by the president of the only remaining superpower in the world.

Indeed, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Sharon's successor, claimed during Bush's January 2008 visit to Israel that "the Palestinians, too, know that there is no new construction or confiscation of land, but they also know that Jerusalem and the settlement blocs do not share the same status as the rest of the West Bank."

Bush's recognition and acceptance of the strategy at the heart of Israel's settlements policy—that settlements are a factor that will determine the borders of the state—marked an unprecedented Israeli achievement that is shaping its diplomacy with the Palestinians. Insofar as Bush has eased Israeli concerns about the acceptability and legality of its colonization efforts, his assurances demonstrate that Israel's preferred address for resolving this issue is Washington, not Palestine. Indeed, the Mitchell Report's support for a settlement freeze, reiterated in 2003 in the road map (see the Special Document section of *JPS* 128), set the stage for extended and detailed, if ultimately in-

conclusive, discussions between Israeli and American diplomats on the finer points of settlement expansion, a process that further compromised long-established U.S. opposition, as a matter of principle, to Israel's settlement policy.

In the post-Annapolis era, Washington intends to insert itself formally as the "referee" with power to determine Israel's compliance with its oft-stated (and more often breached) commitment not to expand existing settlements or establish new ones. To the extent that Washington assumes this role, it compromises Israel's direct, bilateral negotiations with the Palestinians, along with the atrophied policy of U.S. opposition to all settlement. Given this structure, any Israeli decision to revise its settlement policy in the foreseeable future is more likely to emerge from discussions between Jerusalem and Washington—along the Sharon-Bush model, through which Israel believes (with good reason) that additional U.S. concessions on settlements can be won—rather than at the negotiating table with Palestinians.

So, for example, *Ha'Aretz's* Aluf Benn reported on 3 January 2008 that

Israel is seeking to reach an understanding with the U.S. administration that would safeguard Israel's security interests in a future final-status agreement with the Palestinians and during current negotiations. . . . Israel would like the U.S. to agree to a number of limitations on the future Palestinian state's sovereignty. Israel wants Palestine to be completely demilitarized, and for Israel to be able to fly over Palestinian air space. Border crossings would be monitored by Israel in such a way that the symbols of Palestinian sovereignty would not be compromised, but Israel would know who was coming and going.

Israel is to propose the deployment of an international force in the West Bank and along the Philadelphi Route in Rafah, and would ask that a permanent Israel Defense Forces presence remain for an extended period in the Jordan Valley. Discussions with administration officials on this issue began even before the Annapolis summit, during the visit of the Israeli delegation to Washington.

The Other Negotiations: The Internal Israeli Debate

Shimon Peres once quipped that the Oslo negotiations were less about what Palestinians and Israelis agreed to than what Israelis themselves decided to offer. The Oslo process demonstrated the extent to which the internal Israeli debate, rather than talks with the Palestinians, has shaped the diplomatic

agenda on issues of territory, refugee return, and statehood. In one telling example, Israel refused to share with the Palestinian leadership the key Oslo II maps defining Israeli and Palestinian jurisdictions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip until moments before agreement was reached in 1995.

On the face of it, Israel has come a long way since the days of its unequivocal opposition to Palestinian statehood in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. The United States has traveled a similar road. Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, a former Likud "princess" and disciple of Menachem Begin, declared in a 17 December 2007 address to the donors' conference in Paris, just weeks after the Annapolis summit, "I am here because the establishment of a peaceful and prosperous Palestinian state that respects law and order and fulfills the legitimate national aspirations of its people is not just a Palestinian dream, it is also an Israeli interest." George Bush notes with pride that he is the first president to formally endorse the creation of a Palestinian state.

There are many reasons why Israel has embraced the concept of a Palestinian state as the key to resolving the conundrum created by Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in June 1967. As Livni's statement and the aforementioned report by Aluf Benn reveal, however, the nature of the state promoted by Israel and the one that it wants Washington to support is conditioned upon the satisfaction of long-standing Israeli settlement and security interests.

Israel's desire to remove Palestinians in the occupied territories from Israel's direct control and internationally recognized responsibility while retaining its settlements and security prerogatives has changed little in the last 40 years. Prime Minister Menachem Begin's 1977 plan for Palestinian "self-rule"—"autonomy for the people and not the land"—was a product of this interest. Like Israel's contemporary vision of Palestinian statehood, and the limited powers granted to the Palestinian Authority during the Oslo years, Begin's autonomy plan was embraced by Washington. The description of the entity to be created has evolved from self-rule to statehood, but by design the ability of such a "state" to act in a sovereign and independent manner remains compromised.

The Palestinian state on offer today, wrote Ahmad Khalidi, a principal architect of the Abu Mazen-Beilin understandings, in the *Guardian* on 13 December 2007, "is largely a punitive construct devised by the Pales-

tinians' worst historical enemies: Israel and its implacable ally, the U.S. The intention behind the state today is to constrain Palestinian aspirations territorially, to force them to give up on their moral rights, renege on their history, and submit to Israel's diktats on fundamental issues of sovereignty."

On 16 December, Jerusalem's *Al-Quds* observed that "the state that we demand is not the state that Israel and U.S. President George Bush demand. In any case, we believe that the term 'state' may be, or we hope it will be, the opening of a new era or a true glimpse of hope [toward] achieving the dream state that we have long been waiting for."

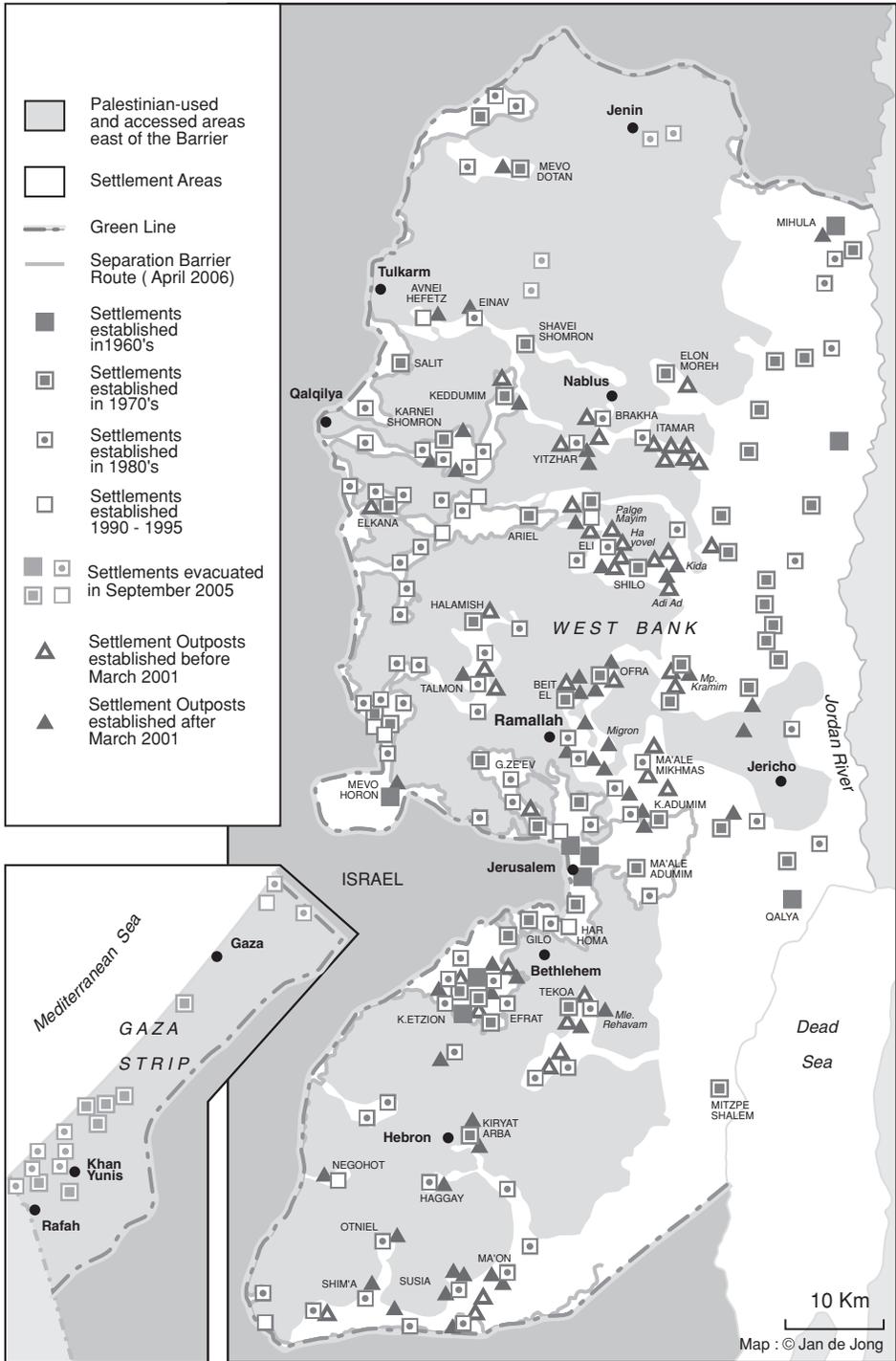
Like the Palestinian Authority of the Oslo era, and Begin's autonomy plan before it, a vision of Palestinian statehood that fails to establish the prerequisites for genuine Palestinian sovereignty and independence, fails to respect International Humanitarian Law and relevant UN Security Council resolutions, and fails to place real limits on Israel's security and settlement prerogatives in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem is a recipe for continuing conflict, instability, and violence. The challenge of the Annapolis process is to create a sovereign, independent Palestinian state, which, having won these attributes, will be committed to living in peace with its neighbor Israel.

SETTLEMENT EXPANSION IN JERUSALEM

In December 2007, scarcely one week after the Annapolis conference, Israeli authorities announced intentions to expand the Har Homa settlement in the southern Jabal Abu Ghunaym neighborhood of East Jerusalem by 300 units. The announcement drew condemnation from U.S. and UN officials alike, as it represented a violation of the principle of settlement freezes agreed to at Annapolis.

The first two articles below provide details on the development of Har Homa, including the role it played during the peace talks of the Clinton administration and the ongoing strategic use of the "absentee property" designation for appropriating land. The next two articles describe other expansion efforts in East Jerusalem, including in the Shaykh Jarrah neighborhood to the north. These articles highlight the role of U.S.-based financiers in supporting settlement expansion.

Settlements Established and Evacuated 1967–2008



TESTING THE SPIRIT OF ANNAPOLIS

This Ha'aretz article by Akiva Eldar was originally published on 10 December 2007.

It is difficult to think of a place more suitable than Har Homa for holding the first test in the spirit of Annapolis. The comparison between Har Homa crisis no. 2 and the development of Har Homa crisis no. 1 can teach us whether the Israeli-Palestinian peace process has indeed started a new track or whether all the players are stuck on the old line.

Does Ehud Olmert, who pressed for the establishment of the new neighborhood in East Jerusalem, really see something different from the prime minister's bureau than what he saw from the office of the mayor of Jerusalem? Will President George W. Bush pay lip service and eventually have to eat his words, just as Bill Clinton did ten years ago?

Meanwhile, it is difficult to find the differences. Har Homa crisis no. 1 also broke out a short while after an American attempt to revive the peace process. In February 1997, a few weeks after it signed the Hebron agreement, the Netanyahu government decided to erect 6,500 housing units on the southern border of East Jerusalem, about one-third of them on private land owned by Palestinians. In the Palestinian Authority (and the Israeli peace camp) this plan was seen as another step in a scheme to cut off their capital from the West Bank. Yasir Arafat threatened to declare the establishment of an independent state and the Palestinian Legislative Council announced a general strike in the territories.

That crisis was the focus of Arafat's visit to the White House the following month. Clinton asked the Palestinian leader to be sensitive to Netanyahu's "coalition pressures." Arafat explained that he, too, had troubles at home and begged the president to at least demand that Israel delay the implementation of the decision to establish the neighborhood. The president sent envoy Dennis Ross to Netanyahu with a letter in which he demanded that the establishment of the neighborhood be postponed.

On the other side were the settlers and the activists from the right. They were flanked by then-mayor Olmert, who a short while earlier had pushed Netanyahu into the Western Wall tunnel—an adventure that ended with the death of 16 Israeli soldiers and dozens of Palestinians. Olmert declared that Har Homa was "the most substantive test of the government's ability to withstand pressure and demonstrate leadership." Work

at the site began four days later. The U.S. secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, called U.S. Ambassador Martin Indyk at 5:30 A.M. and instructed him to go to Netanyahu with a firm message stating that the United States saw the establishment of the new neighborhood as "a step that undermines everything that we are trying to do."

The ambassador made his protest, the Arabs demonstrated, the UN Security Council met, the United States cast a veto—and Har Homa was taken off the international agenda. Arafat licked another wound and Hamas threw more salt on it.

The new neighborhood—or, from one point of view, the "settlement"—which arose on the southern hills of Jerusalem became a mark of Cain on the forehead of the Oslo camp in Ramallah. Ed Abington, who was then American consul general in Jerusalem, said later, "Arafat understood that we do not understand, or do not want to understand, the enormity of the troubles that the settlements cause him at home. Arafat understood that he was left alone in the campaign."

Netanyahu identified the weakness of the international community and continued to nurture the settlers. The response today of spokesmen for the Olmert government gives rise to the fear that the Annapolis conference did not change the situation on the Israeli side. They claim that "the neighborhood is within the area of the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem, over which Israeli law is binding, and therefore there is no prohibition to building there, just as there is no obstacle to building in any other part of Israel."

We have already forgotten that the prime minister agreed that everything would be open to negotiation, including Jerusalem. Is this the way to build a wall to fortify the status of PA President Mahmud Abbas? And what will "the world" do—all those people who were in attendance at Annapolis—if Olmert decides to hide behind "pressures from the coalition" and approves the new construction?

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said over the weekend that new construction in the territories does not contribute to building mutual trust. She also stressed the special importance of refraining from moves that could have influence a final status agreement. The UN secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, said that the decision to expand the neighborhood "is not helpful."

So the gentiles say these things—and thousands of Jewish residents laugh all the

way to Har Homa. And what will happen to the spirit of Annapolis? The same thing that happened to the spirit of Hebron.

**HAR HOMA NEIGHBORHOOD SLATED FOR
“ABSENTEE” PALESTINIAN LAND**

This Ha’Aretz article by Meron Rapoport was published 6 January 2008.

The Housing Ministry is pushing forward with the construction of more than 1,000 residential units in East Jerusalem’s Har Homa neighborhood on land held by “absentee” Palestinians from the Bethlehem area. The move is in violation of both an instruction from the attorney general to stop applying the absentee law in East Jerusalem and explicit promises to the U.S. not to apply that law in the capital’s eastern quarters.

About four weeks ago, the Housing Ministry published a tender to build 300 units to complete Stage B of the Har Homa plan. The tender evoked international outrage and U.S. and Palestinian pressure to block the construction. It is now evident that most of the land for the 300 units belongs to residents of Bayt Sahur who were declared absentee, so their lands were taken by the state without compensation or legal hearings.

According to ownership maps of the area, of the 24-dunam (6 acres; 1 acre = 4 dunams) area slated for the construction, 18 dunams belonged to Bayt Sahur residents and six dunams were appropriated from Jewish owners. A total of 188 of the apartments are slated for construction on the absentee land.

The application of the absentee law to East Jerusalem has been very controversial ever since the annexation of the eastern part of the city after the Six-Day War. Then-attorney general Meir Shemgar stated one year after the war that there was no “justification for the annexation of East Jerusalem to amount to taking a person’s property” and recommended not applying the law. Over the years there have been changes in this position, and in late 2004 the Ministerial Committee on Jerusalem Affairs decided, in an unreported meeting, to resume application of the absentee law.

After that decision was published in *Ha’Aretz*, the U.S. government demanded it be changed. As a result, in February 2005, Attorney General Menachem Mazuz published instructions adopting the 1968 Shemgar opinion and ordered the “immediate cessation of the application of the absentee law on East Jerusalem assets.”

Apparently that instruction has not been implemented. In addition to the 300 units

mentioned above, the state apparently plans to build another 1,000 apartments on absentee lands in Stage 3 of Har Homa. The construction of the new neighborhood was approved by the Jerusalem municipal planning board. The Housing Ministry is moving forward, even after Prime Minister Ehud Olmert directed that he be apprised of any construction plans in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

The new neighborhood is planned for east of the already-constructed Har Homa, in close proximity to Bayt Sahur and Bethlehem. If built, it would isolate Bethlehem completely from the Palestinian neighborhoods south of Jerusalem.

In a hearing by the Jerusalem planning board last January, city council member Pepe Alalu opposed the plan, saying the area could serve to expand Bayt Sahur, which suffers from great overcrowding. In response, the Jerusalem district planner for the Housing Ministry, Ayalon Bernard, said the residents of Sur Baher “do not own the Stage 3 and Stage 4 Har Homa lands, which belong to Bethlehemites. The landowners are absentees.”

The land is farmland owned by about 600 Bayt Sahur families who worked the plots until the construction of the separation fence in the area.

The Justice Ministry preferred to ignore the apparent contradiction between Mazuz’s 2005 instructions and what appears to be [a] sweeping application of the absentee law in order to build new neighborhoods at Har Homa.

The Justice Ministry said in a response that the land for the Har Homa construction was expropriated for public purposes from Jewish owners also, and that the absentee issue is irrelevant.

In its response, the Housing Ministry stated, “there is no decision to stop the construction” of Har Homa Stage 3 and technical amendments to the plans will be submitted to the district planning committee in the coming months to enable approval of the plan.

**JEWISH GROUP TO BUILD 200 NEW HOUSING
UNITS IN EAST JERUSALEM**

This article by Meron Rapoport was published in Ha’Aretz 31 January 2007.

The Yemin Yehuda nonprofit association has begun building 200 housing units in the Shimon Hatzaddik compound, in the heart of East Jerusalem’s Shaykh Jarrah neighborhood. In the process, the organization

intends to demolish the homes of dozens of Palestinian families who live there.

This neighborhood is in a strategic location: If Yemin Yehuda completes its plan, it will cut the Old City off from the Palestinian neighborhoods in northern Jerusalem.

MK Benny Elon (National Union-National Religious Party), who supports building the new neighborhood, says it is designed to create a Jewish continuum surrounding the Old City, where there currently is a massive Palestinian majority. Elon says this can be done by declaring open areas to be national parks and placing state property back-to-back with lands under Jewish ownership.

“Building Jewish neighborhoods next to open areas will prevent invasion and illegal construction by Palestinians who live near the Old City,” says Elon.

The new neighborhood is slated to cover 18 dunams (1 acre = 4 dunams) next to the tomb of Shimon Hatzaddik. According to the plan submitted to the Jerusalem municipal planning commission, Palestinian buildings must be demolished to make room for 200 housing units. The plan states that open areas will become residential, and that the construction density in the area will be increased to include five- and six-story buildings, which will require changing the Municipal Construction Plan.

Deputy Mayor Yehoshua Pollack, who heads the local commission, says he is not familiar with the new plan, but that he seeks to “advance any construction plan, be it by Jews or Arabs.” Pollack noted that contrary to reports that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had ordered a halt to construction in East Jerusalem, the municipality has not been informed of any such restrictions.

In 2004, Jerusalem Mayor Uri Lupolianski sought Housing Ministry permission to build a Jewish neighborhood adjacent to the Shimon Hatzaddik tomb, “in order to strengthen the connection between the Jewish neighborhoods” in East Jerusalem.

Currently, about 40 Palestinian families live in the area, which is very close to the American Colony Hotel, one of the most important centers of Palestinian and international activity in East Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, the American Jewish millionaire Irving Moskowitz already has purchased the nearby Shepherd’s Hotel, and wants to build several dozen housing units there for Jews. Furthermore, about two months ago, *Ha’Aretz* reported that the Israel Lands Administration had leased the Ateret Cohanim

organization a large area known as Kerem Hamufti, opposite Shepherd’s Hotel.

The Jewish Continuum

Connecting all these dots could create a significant Jewish continuum and cut Shaykh Jarrah and the Old City off from the Palestinian neighborhoods to the north. A Jewish neighborhood had existed at the Shimon Hatzaddik compound until 1948, when the Jewish inhabitants fled during the war. The area was settled by Palestinians fleeing from West Jerusalem.

After the Six-Day War, the Sephardic Community Committee and the Ashkenazi Community Committee initiated proceedings to claim the area, on the grounds that it had belonged to them since the nineteenth century.

About 30 years ago, some of the Palestinian families agreed to start paying rent to the two organizations. A few years ago, the Nahalat Shimon association received the rights from the two organizations. It is initiating the construction of the new neighborhood.

The Palestinian residents, represented by attorney Salah Abu Hussein, argued that the land belongs to a Palestinian who lives in Jerusalem. The Supreme Court rejected the Palestinian’s ownership claim two years ago, but refused to state who does own the land.

Abu Hussein says the Palestinian residents have been paying rent for decades under an agreement that grants them ownership after 30 years. Meir Margalit of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions says the new plan is very dangerous because it aims to thwart any chance of a future agreement based on the division of Jerusalem.

THE JUDAIZATION OF EAST JERUSALEM (EXCERPTS)

This opinion piece by Alice Rothchild was first published in the Salt Lake Tribune 24 November 2007.

[W]hen Israel annexed East Jerusalem, the state declared only 12 percent of the land zoned for Palestinian residential purposes, and that land was already developed, while 34 percent was zoned for future Jewish settlements. Thus, for the 240,000 Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, there is a serious housing shortage and prices are high. This has been further complicated by construction of the eight-meter-high concrete separation wall which winds its way through the

city, separating families from each other, educational institutions and employment. . . .

Interestingly, millions of dollars of U.S. money have been poured into the growing Jewish settlements in this area. Without any complaints from the Bush administration, real estate developers openly advertise homes in the West Bank—heavily subsidized by the Israeli government—to Jews in the United Kingdom and the United States.

A particularly egregious player in this dangerous political game is Irving Moskowitz, a U.S. physician and bingo and gambling magnate, who secretly purchases Palestinian homes in and around East Jerusalem using front organizations that appear to be Arab, and then rapidly flips the property to extremist Jewish settlers, often arranging new construction and infusions of militant settlers at particularly sensitive political moments.

His foundation is also an avid supporter of American Friends of Ateret Cohanim, a group of militant Jews who believe that Jews should be in sole control of the Old City and should rebuild the Old Temple on the site of the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque.

Moskowitz earmarks millions of dollars for militant settler religious schools most analogous to the extremist *madrasas* and recruitment centers often condemned in the Islamic world. These messianic, ideologically driven young Jewish students, like their counterparts in Hebron and other Jewish settlements driven by religious entitlement, are a clear impediment to any movement towards peace in this region.

It is a sad irony that the U.S. government spends millions of dollars tracking down wealthy Arab financiers who support extremist Islamic groups. At the same time, financiers like Moskowitz, using a combination of subterfuge, bribery, and U.S. and Israeli governmental collusion, openly and provocatively change the face of East Jerusalem.

At the end of the day, it is the facts on the ground that speak most clearly. One can only wonder what Israeli Prime Minister Olmert is thinking when he talks about a viable Palestinian state while actively making such a dream unreachable.

NEW SETTLER STRATEGIES

In the past few months, several articles have appeared in the Israeli and U.S. press describing a shift in settlement strategy in the occupied West Bank. This strategy aims at expanding existing settlements (rather

than establishing entirely new ones) via outposts, with the goal of consolidating territory around Jerusalem in anticipation of any future land-swaps that may accompany a peace deal. Jewish youth play a central, active role in setting up and maintaining these settlement outposts in defiance of occasional Israeli military raids.

GROUP BIDS TO KEEP OUTPOST MOVEMENT ALIVE (EXCERPTS)

This article, written by Dina Kraft for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, was originally published on 11 December 2007.

In the past, what would begin as a small cluster of tents or trailers often evolved into de facto settlements with homes, fields, and even running water and electricity. Sometimes they would be set up by the government itself.

In recent years, however, the mainstream settler movement, represented by the Yesha Council, has begun focusing more on preserving existing settlements than creating new ones, given the increasing likelihood of a future Israeli withdrawal from most of the West Bank.

In Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's vision, the larger settlement blocs would be annexed to Israel. As a result, a new settler organization called the Land of Israel Faithful has set out to occupy as many hilltops as possible—specifically ones near existing settlements, so the existing settlements grow to other hilltops.

Headed by Rabbi Moshe Levinger, the American-born founder of the current Jewish neighborhood in Hebron, members of the Land of Israel Faithful say they hope these settlements will grow and foil any possible future peace deal with the Palestinians.

The former mayor of the Jewish West Bank settlement of Keddumim, Daniella Weiss, who is on the group's board, said that in meetings at homes and hilltops across the west bank, people of all ages are coming together to strategize on how to best stake out what they see as their biblical birthright.

Small donations fund their work, which includes advertising and buying equipment such as generators. Fellow settlers are recruited to help bring food, water and logistical support to those who set up the outposts.

"Politics are very much influenced by what we, the settler movement, do on the land," Weiss said. "With our building more outposts and more settlements, we prevent

the government from fulfilling the idea of giving away territories.”

Until about four years ago, the outpost activity was more intense, according to Dror Etkes, the former director of a Peace Now settlement monitoring project. But now, with a shift in political direction by both the government and the settler leadership, as well as more information and media scrutiny of the outposts, the movement to build them has become more one of protest than of successfully establishing “facts on the ground.”

Until about 2003, “there were tractors and bulldozers and phones and water,” Etkes said. By contrast, “what we are seeing today is more political.”

Etkes noted that most of the outpost activity now is conducted during school vacations, when high school students can be called upon to camp out with sleeping bags and boxes of supplies until they are evacuated by the police.

YOUNG ISRAELIS RESIST CHALLENGE TO SETTLEMENTS (EXCERPTS)

This article, written by Isabel Kershner, originally appeared in the New York Times on 8 December 2007.

Shvut Ami Outpost, West Bank—For two months, Jewish youths have been renovating an old stone house on this muddy hilltop in the northern West Bank. The house is not theirs, however. It belongs to a Palestinian family. And their seizure of it, along with the land around it, for a new settlement outpost is a violation of Israeli law. The police have evicted the group five times, but they keep coming back.

Yedidya Slonim, 16, one of the renovators here, who grew up in another West Bank settlement, Tzofim, said of the police: “We come back straight away, as soon as they’ve gone. They come every week for half a day. It doesn’t bother us so much.”

[T]he settlers continue building a patchwork of communities to try to preclude the drawing of a border between Israel and a future Palestinian state. At the vanguard are the hilltop youth, teenagers like Yedidya, who work to complicate the demographic map ever more. . . .

According to Peace Now, an Israeli advocacy group that tracks settlement activity, most of the hundred or so outposts already

in existence are built at least partially on private Palestinian land. Shvut Ami sits across a valley from Mitzpe Ishai, a new neighborhood of the Jewish settlement of Keddumim. Keddumim was established in the 1970s between the Palestinian villages of Funduk, Kadum and Imaten, about seven miles east of the 1967 lines. . . .

The Shvut Ami outpost sits on private Palestinian land inherited by the two wives and children of Abd al-Ghani Salah Amar, of Kadum, according to ownership records produced by the family.

Mr. Amar built the stone house in 1963, ten years before he died. The roughly 17 acres of land are planted with hundreds of olive and almond trees, some figs and some vines. The estate is managed by one of Mr. Amar’s daughters, Badriya Amar, a 61-year-old widow who still lives in Kadum. Mrs. Amar filed an official complaint with the Israeli police in early October for trespassing on her family land. Micky Rosenfeld, a police spokesman, said the ownership documents were being examined by the authorities for authenticity.

In the meantime, the site has been declared a closed military zone. Behind the settler youths who are building here are the guiding hands of adults. One of the leading ideologues of the outpost movement is Daniella Weiss, a former mayor of Keddumim.

Yedidya says that “someone” from Keddumim connected them to the water mains, and local supporters bring food and raise funds.

Based on experience, there is no guarantee when Shvut Ami, Hebrew for “my people’s return,” will be restored to Mrs. Amar. Another illegal outpost, Migron, was established on private Palestinian land in 2002. More than 40 families now live there in trailer homes. Peace Now successfully petitioned Israel’s Supreme Court in 2006 to order its removal, but in Migron, nothing has changed. At the latest hearing, on 1 November, Israel’s defense minister, Ehud Barak, asked for a two-month extension to allow him to formulate a comprehensive plan for the removal of illegal outposts.

Mrs. Amar last visited her orchards in early November, to try to pick a few olives. She was chased away by the settlers, she said.