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The Pivotal Role of Israel’s Colonization Policy in the Failure of the Peace Process

Jad Isaac

Introduction:

Palestinian refugees, Jerusalem, Jewish colonies, water and borders all constitute the corner stone of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. All the previous issues, which are ranked here according to order of relevance or priority, have been postponed till final status negotiations. In fact, these issues were recognized to be a major source of conflict since the beginning of the peace process, but somehow, the negotiators and mediators were able to come out with “constructive ambiguity” wordings aimed at avoiding confrontations on these issues from the beginning in the hope that with time, Israelis and Palestinians will build mutual confidence that will assist them to address these issues and resolve them in the final status negotiations. The final status framework was postponed until Camp David II summit when President Bill Clinton and the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, during the last few months of their office, put forth a proposal for the final status issues. The proposal opened the Pandora box of final status issues in a hasty manner with a “take it or leave it” approach that had no real chance to succeed.

On the ground, Israel continued expanding Jewish colonies that elevated Palestinian fears regarding Israel’s genuine aspirations for a just settlement. After 8 years of negotiation, Palestinians did not feel the dividend of peace and thus, the Intifada erupted in September 28,2000. Jerusalem, borders and settlements are all interlinked; however, it is argued here that the issue of Jewish colonies (settlements) is perceived by Palestinians as the most apparent peace indicator and thus may be the pivotal cause of the Intifada and the failure of the peace process.

The Geopolitical Background:

In 1923, the borders of mandatory Palestine were defined to include an area of 27000 sq.km. In 1948, a UN partition plan was proposed to divide Palestine into a Jewish and Arab state, ([see figure 1](#)).



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The Arabs rejected the partition plan on the ground that Jews who represented at that time 7 % of the total population cannot be entitled to such a large proportion of historical Palestine. War erupted and the result was that Israel in 1948 had control over 78 % of mandatory Palestine ([see figure 2](#)).



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As a result of the 1948 War, approximately 714,000 of the 800,000 Palestinians lost their lands, homes and properties while at least 418 villages were depopulated and/or demolished. In 1967, Israel occupied the West Bank including East Jerusalem and Gaza, which constitute half of what the UN Resolution 181 had proposed as the Arab State and 22% of historical Palestine.

Since the occupation, Israel has either confiscated or declared as closed areas over 55% of the West Bank and 25% of the Gaza Strip, thereby placing it out of Palestinian reach. Palestinians are allowed to use less than 15% of their water resources. Israel has pursued a policy of colonizing Palestine through a settlement policy in an attempt to change its demographic character. Presently, there are 18

Israeli colonies in the Gaza Strip housing an estimated 6,000 Israeli colonists, and over 200 in the West Bank with a population of more than 400,000 colonists; half of who reside in East Jerusalem. Colonies are distributed all over the West Bank (see figure 3)

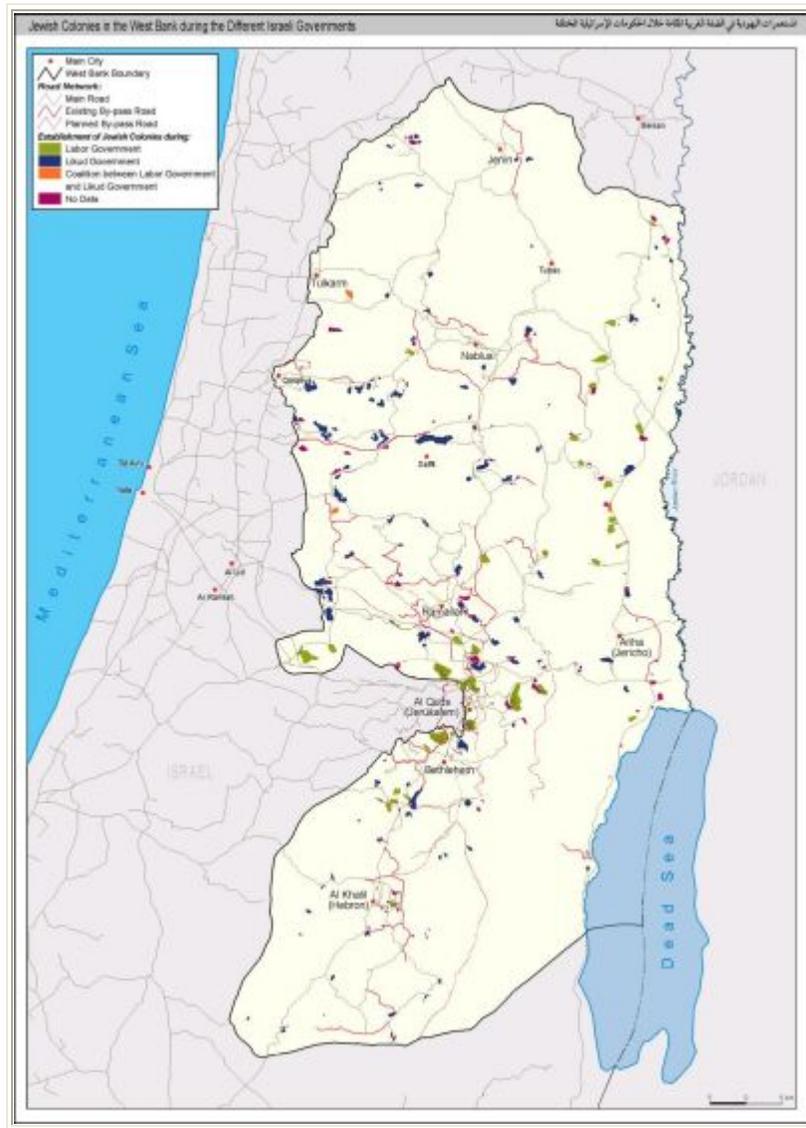


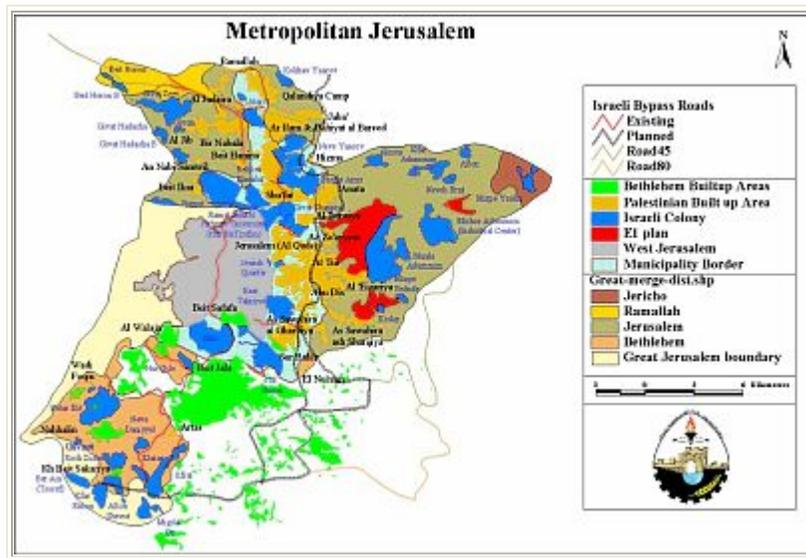
Figure 3 shows the spatial distribution of settlements according to Israeli governments. It indicates that the Labor governments focused their colonization activities around Jerusalem, Latroun area, the Jordan Valley and Gush Etzion . On the other hand, Likud governments adopted a policy of reinforcing settlements in Jerusalem in addition to settling Jews in the heart of the West Bank. In the Latroun area, there were three Palestinian villages there: Yalu, Beit Nuba, and Imwas. In 1967, they were destroyed and wiped out of the map. Canadian Jews



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donated money to convert the place of these villages to what is called now the Canada Park.

In Jerusalem, Israel expanded the borders of East Jerusalem from 6.5 km² to 71 km² to cover areas from Ramallah and Bethlehem districts. Those borders were drawn to include as much vacant land and as little Palestinian built up area as possible, (see Figure 4).



The Knesset formally annexed East Jerusalem in 1980 but the expansion of the municipal borders and colonization by confiscation of private Palestinian property started soon after the 1967 war. Today Israel is in complete control of the city, yet most of the property and real estate still legally belongs to the indigenous Palestinians who have been living continuously in Jerusalem for centuries. Israel's intensive development program after 1967 has involved the construction of housing and associated infrastructure in the unilaterally annexed and expanded territory of occupied East Jerusalem. In addition, in Jerusalem's Old City, the Israeli authorities evicted immediately following the 1967 war an entire neighborhood (Al Maghareba) and leveled it to the ground in order to make way for the Wailing Wall Plaza. Over the years, Israel has been able to take control over 55 location in the old city of Jerusalem .

In 1987, the Intifada broke out carrying its message of rejecting the continuation of occupation and at the same time, calling for a resolution to the historic conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Consequently, the Palestinian people, by and large, accepted the discourse of peaceful negotiations based on the grounds outlined in the Madrid Conference of 1991. The guiding principles of these negotiations were 'Land for Peace' and the United Nations Resolutions 242 and



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338. After several rounds of formal talks in Washington, the PLO and Israel were able to come out with historic agreement on the Declaration of Principles (DOP), which was signed in September 1993.

The Declaration of Principles (DOP), which was signed in 1993, called for an Interim period of 5 years during which the representatives of the Palestinian people and the Israeli government will initiate negotiations over the final status, which include Jerusalem, refugees, colonies, borders and water. It was also agreed upon that neither party should initiate any action during the interim period that might jeopardize the outcome of final status negotiations. The "Oslo II" agreement, signed in Washington D.C. in September of 1995, sets out the interim stage for Palestinian Autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza, pending "final status negotiations" which were scheduled to begin in May 1996 and finish by May 1999. The Interim Agreement states that: " the first phase of the Israeli military forces redeployment will cover populated areas in the West Bank - cities, towns, villages, refugee camps and hamlets - as set out in Annex I, and will be completed prior to the eve of the Palestinian elections, i.e., 22 days before the day of the elections. The further redeployments of Israeli military forces to specified military locations will be gradually implemented in accordance with the DOP in three phases, each to take place after an interval of six months, after the inauguration of the Council, to be completed within 18 months from the date of the inauguration of the Council. During the further redeployment phases to be completed within 18 months from the date of the inauguration of the Council, powers and responsibilities relating to territory will be transferred gradually to Palestinian jurisdiction that will cover West Bank and Gaza Strip territory, except for the issues that will be negotiated in the permanent status negotiations. This meant that 97 % of the West Bank and Gaza should have become under Palestinian control 18 months after the inauguration of the Council.

On the ground, Palestinians gained initial control over 70 % of the Gaza strip and 3 % of the West Bank as area A and 24% as area B . In January 1997, The Hebron protocol was signed in which 85 % of the city came under the PNA control (H1). 15 % of the city area was designated as area H2 and remained under Israeli control. Area H2 includes around 20,000 Palestinians and 400 Jewish colonists.

After a one and half year freeze, the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations were restarted and the Wye memorandum was signed in 1998, which included a detailed plan for implementation. Israel implemented the first phase and then new elections took place in Israel. At Sharm el Sheikh, a new memorandum was signed. The following table outlines the stages of the interim agreements

.Table 1: The Redeployment percentages according to the agreements.



Agreement	Date	Area		
		A	B	C
Oslo II	May 1994	3 %	24 %	73 %
Wye I	October 1998	10.1 %	18.9 %	71 %
Wye II & III (not implemented)	--	18.2 %	21.8 %	60 %
Sharm I	September 1999	10.1 %	25.9 %	64 %
Sharm II (implemented in delay)	January 2000	12.1 %	26.9 %	61 %
Sharm III (implemented in delay)	March 2000	18.2 %	21.8 %	60 %

The Interim agreement divided the lands of Palestine into three classifications: areas A, B, and C. The Israeli military withdrew from lands classified as area A, and complete control was assumed by the Palestinian National Authority. This marked the first time that a Palestinian government retained sovereignty over any of their land. At present (March 2001), area A comprises 1004 km² of the West Bank and 254.2 km² of the Gaza Strip. In area B, the Palestinians have full control over civil society except that Israel continues to have overriding responsibility for security. These areas constitute now 1204 km² of the West Bank. In area C, Israel retains full control over land, security, people and natural resources. This situation has remained static since the Sharm El Sheikh phase III redeployment in March 2000.

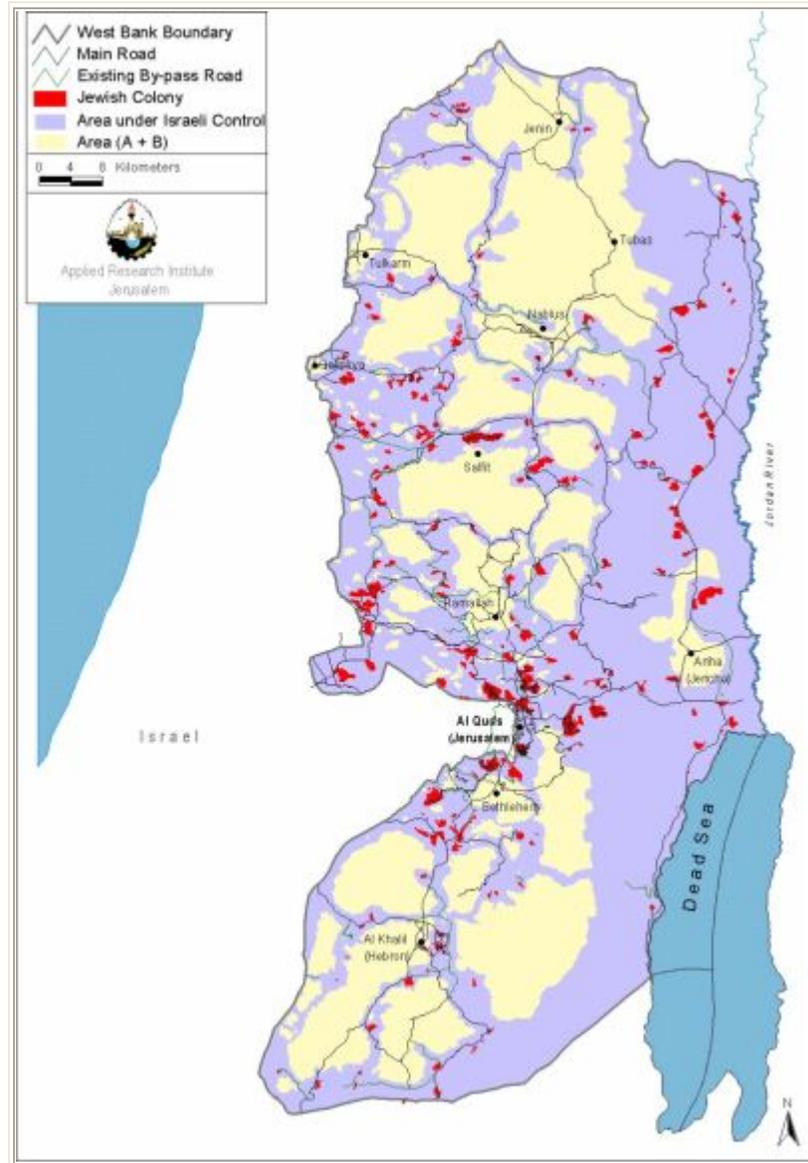
The status of Palestinian built-up areas lying in Area C after the March 2000 withdrawal is as follows:

1. There are 161 distinct “islands” of Palestinian control (i.e. Area A or Area B) surrounded by a sea of Area C
2. There are 105 Palestinian villages that are still completely within area C and 216 that have parts in area C.
3. No Palestinian lives more than 6.5 km from a part of Area C.

The jagged distribution of yellow and blue areas in the Gaza strip and areas A, B, C, H1 and H2 has partitioned the West Bank and Gaza into isolated cantons, which are physically separated from each other, ([see figure 5](#)).



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Despite the signing of the Wye and Sharm El Sheikh Memorandums, following the Hebron Protocol, Israel continued its unilateral actions of land confiscation, settlements expansion and demolition of houses in violation of the agreements signed. Israel failed to comply with the signed agreements and thus the support of the peace process among Palestinians started to diminish.

In July 2000, President Clinton hosted the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships for a summit in Camp David in an attempt to revitalize the peace process through an agreement on a final status framework. This was the first real negotiations that tried to address final status issues. **The Clinton parameters for a final status**



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agreement related to settlements, borders and Jerusalem included the following Territory:

Based on what I heard, I believe that the solution should be in the mid-90 percents, between 94-96 percent of the West Bank territory of the Palestinian State.

The land annexed by Israel should be compensated by a land swap of 1-3 percent in addition to territorial arrangements such as a permanent safe passage.

The parties also should consider the swap of leased land to meet their respective needs...

The Parties should develop a map consistent with the following criteria:

- 80% of settlers in blocks
- contiguity
- Minimize the annexed areas
- Minimize the number of Palestinian affected Jerusalem:

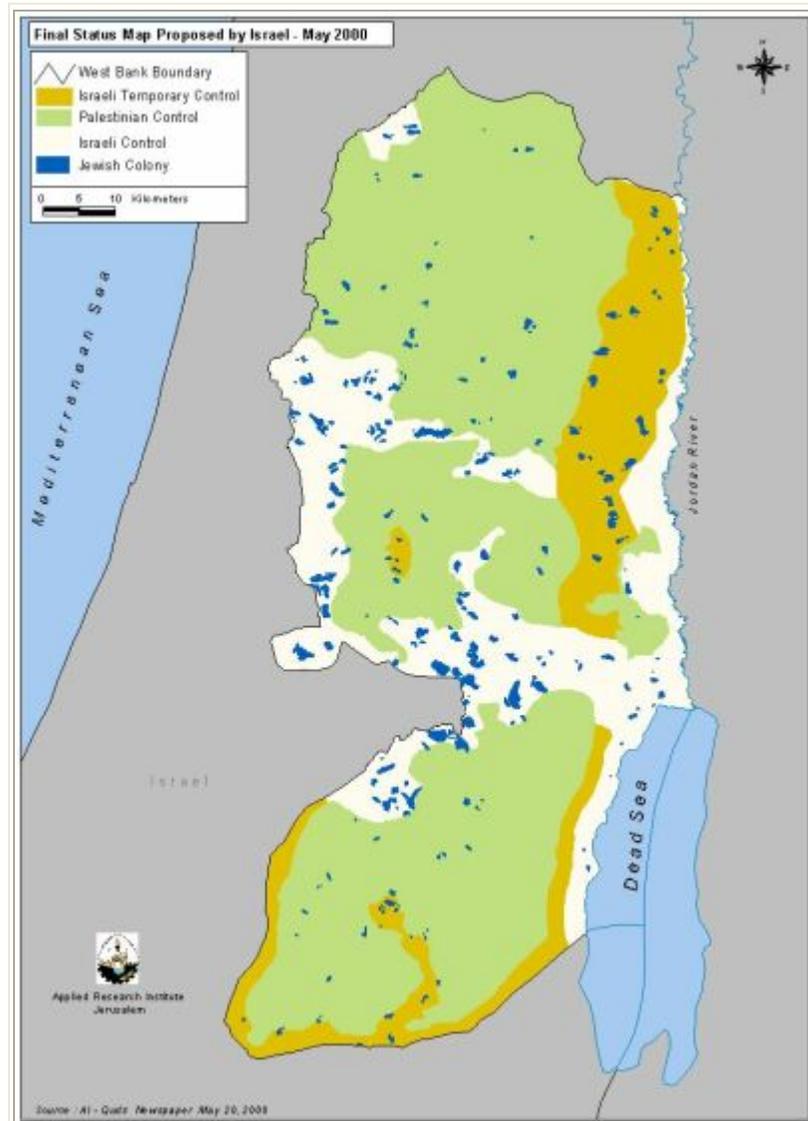
The general principle is that Arab areas are Palestinian and Jewish ones are Israeli. This would apply to the Old City as well. I urge the two sides to work on maps to create maximum contiguity for both sides.

Regarding the Haram\Temple Mount, I believe that the gaps are not related to practical administration but to symbolic issues of sovereignty and to finding a way to accord respect to the religious beliefs of both sides.

I know you have been discussing a number of formulations. I add to these two additional formulations guaranteeing Palestinian effective control over the Haram while respecting the conviction of the Jewish People. **Regarding either one of those two formulations will be international monitoring to provide mutual confidence:**

1. Palestinian sovereignty over the Haram and Israeli sovereignty over a) the Western Wall and the space sacred to Judaism of which it is a part or b) the Western Wall and the Holy of Holies of which it is a part. There will be a firm commitment by both not to excavate beneath the Haram or behind the Wall.
2. Palestinian sovereignty over the Haram and Israeli sovereignty over the Western Wall and shared functional sovereignty over the issue of excavation under the Haram and behind the Wall such that

mutual consent would be requested before any excavation can take place, ([see figure 6](#)).



[Figure 6](#) :shows a map that was given to the Palestinians during Camp David summit.

Palestinians could not accept such a proposal which totally negates UN resolutions 242 and 338 as well as the right of return and carves the West Bank to accommodate Jewish settlements and perpetuates Israeli control on large areas in East Jerusalem. On 28 September, 2000, al Aqsa Intifada erupted following the provocative entry of Mr. Ariel Sharon to the sacred vicinity of Al Aqsa. The Israeli closure forced on the Palestinian Territories since the beginning of the

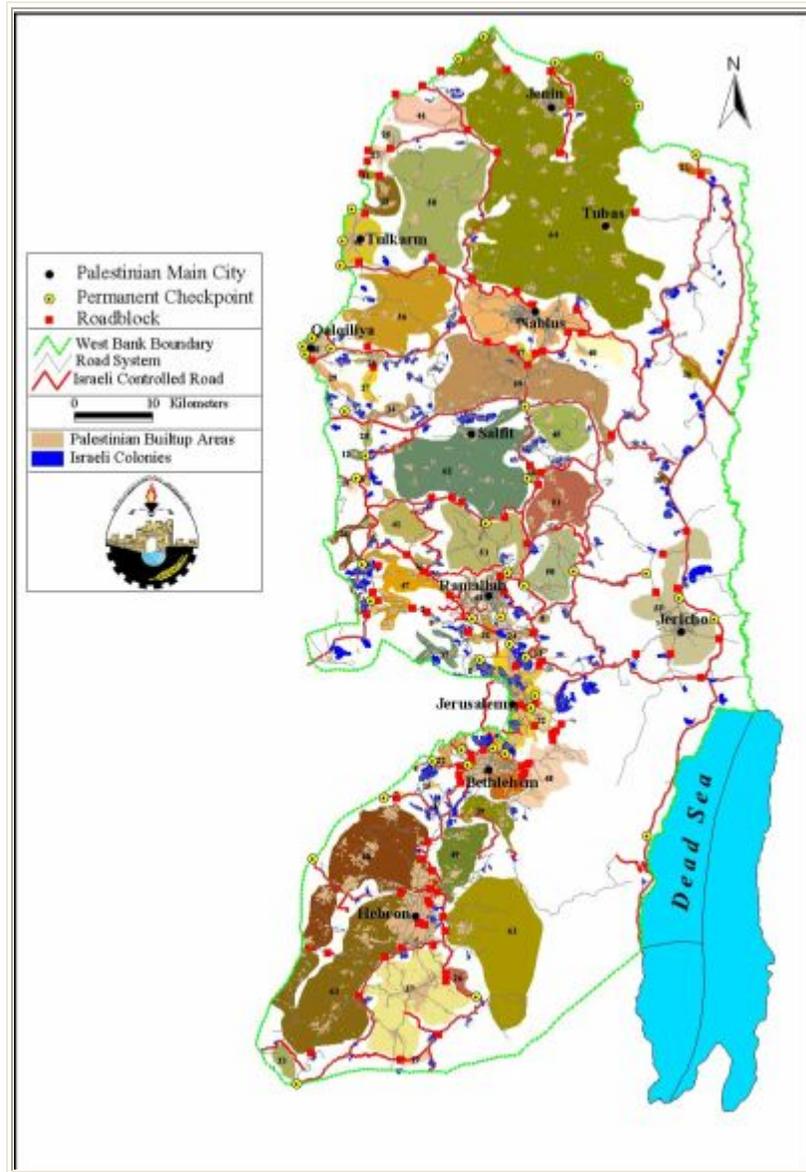


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Aqsa Intifada has restricted the ability of Palestinians to travel and work to a degree unprecedented in the 34-year Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The internal closure separates Palestinian localities from each other and results in the hampering or complete freezing of the economic, political, educational, medical, and social service activities necessary for a healthy society. Such a cantonization of the Palestinian Territories is achieved through the use of roadblocks (including destroying the roads themselves), checkpoints, and military patrols, all built upon the skeleton of the Jewish colonies.

In an attempt to rescue the peace process, president Arafat launched an initiative to resume negotiations. In January , 2001, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators held marathon negotiations in Taba. By then, Israeli elections were close and thus, the Israeli leadership could not take the necessary decisions. The Israeli side repackaged their old positions which do not meet Palestinian aspirations. The Israeli side blamed the Palestinians for not accepting their “generous” offer and played the percentage game claiming they offered the Palestinians more than 97 % of the West Bank. The fact is that Israel insisted on retaining the Modi’in , Gush Etzion, Ariel and Jerusalem settlements blocks which account for more than 12 % of the West Bank. The Taba negotiations failed and Israel continued its unilateral actions.

By overlaying maps of the checkpoints and roadblocks in the West Bank with a map of Areas A and B, a composite map was developed that interprets how the Israeli army has carried out its plan to divide the West Bank into 64 isolated areas and where those areas lie, [\(see figure 7\)](#).



Beyond the immediate impact of this internal closure on Palestinian life in all West Bank districts, the areas in which the Israeli authorities have isolated Palestinians has far-reaching political implications. In an interview with Ariel Sharon by a Ha'aretz correspondent on April 12, 2001 the Prime Minister declared that he would relinquish only 42% of the West Bank for a future Palestinian state. He also declared a complete unwillingness to evacuate any Jewish colonies, the centerpiece of Israeli claims to the land. Says Sharon: "It's not by accident that the settlements are located where they are. They safeguard the cradle of the Jewish people's birth and also provide strategic depth which is vital to our existence. The settlements were established according to the conception



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that, come what may, we have to hold the western security area, which is adjacent to the Green Line, and the eastern security area along the Jordan River and the roads linking the two. And Jerusalem, of course. And the hill aquifer.”

The cumulative area of the 64 cantons in map 7 constitutes about 40% of the total West Bank area. If Sharon has his way, this area will correspond closely with that of any Palestinian “state” recognized by Israel in the indefinite future. Such an arrangement would, in fact, eliminate the possibility of a viable state and leave the Palestinians in permanent subjectivity to Israel. The resulting Palestinian enclaves would be completely surrounded by Israel and movement from and between these areas dependent upon Israeli approval. Furthermore, what Sharon calls the western and eastern security areas, along with the hill aquifer, are the most fertile parts of the West Bank and the richest sources of water. This would leave the Palestinians with no basis for economic development..

Table 2: summarizes Israeli violations since Ariel Sharon came to power

Approving Housing units	12260	Housing Units
Approving master plans to serve colony expansion	14	Plans
Houses demolished	33	Houses
Houses receiving demolition orders	50	Houses
Bypass road construction	13	Roads

While the entire world is busy in its efforts to combat terrorism and make the world safer, the Israeli government is exploiting the situation by further increasing its unilateral steps and creating facts on the ground that are aggravating Palestinians aspiration for peace and justice

On 24 September, 2001, the Israeli government issued a military order numbered 01/01/s through which 80,000 dunams of Palestinian land (1.4% of the total area of the West Bank) in the North of the West Bank were declared as closed military areas.

According to this military order, no one has the right to enter this area without having special permission from the Israeli Defense Ministry.

The total population residing in the mentioned area is 16,729 Palestinian inhabitants. Another 15 villages and Palestinians communities will be also affected. Farmers from these villages who own agricultural lands inside the “closed area” will not be allowed to enter their fields unless they get official permission. This will increase their daily suffering and result in an enormous



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agricultural loss, especially when farmers start preparing for the olive picking season.

This unilateral step has an adverse effect on Palestinian society, especially for people who reside in the nearby villages and are dependent on nearby cities for their daily needs, such as employment, education, and health services. This policy of imposing restrictions on freedom of movement as collective punishment exacerbates the economic hardship among Palestinians. Palestinians see in this act another Israeli attempt to grab more Palestinian land and annex it to Israel which cast doubt about Israel's genuine aspirations for peace and its willingness to comply with UN resolution 242 and 338 which call for the withdrawal of IDF from all areas it occupied in 1967.

The recently proposed plan to create a security zone along the east side of the [1949 Armistice Line \(Green Line\)](#) reveals how the Israeli government continues to mistakenly believe it can deny justice to the Palestinian people and at the same time maintain a life-style for Israelis that resembles a society at peace with its neighbors. It also demonstrates how the twin goals of separation and expansion are often held in tension.

Colonization Policy and Facts:

As discussed above, since the signing of the Declaration of Principles in 1993, Israel has followed a policy of creating de facto realities on the ground to affect the outcome of the final status negotiations. Israel has accelerated its colonizing activities by confiscating more Palestinian land to establish new colonies on hilltops and build a comprehensive network of by-pass roads. These activities have been a main source of the instability in the peace negotiations between the government of Israel and the Palestinians.

According to Israeli data there are 140 colonies in the West Bank and Gaza, however satellite images show 282 Jewish built-up areas in the West Bank including East Jerusalem and 26 in Gaza. This is excluding military sites. These built-up areas cover 150.5 sq. km (GIS database, ARIJ, 2000). The discrepancy stems from the fact that Israeli sources consider those Jewish built-up areas in East Jerusalem as neighborhoods of the municipal Jerusalem and not as settlements. Currently the total number of colonists in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip number around 400,000 of which nearly 200,000 are in East Jerusalem alone.



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Table 3: Land Use in the West Bank

Land	Area in km ²	Percent of the West Bank
Palestinian built-up areas in the West Bank	367.7	6%
Jewish colonies in the West Bank	150.5	3%
Israeli Military Base	37.9	1%
Closed Military Area	999.1	18%

The preceding table shows how Israel managed, in 30 years of occupation, to create half as much built up area in the West Bank as the Palestinians have in 5000 years. Through land confiscation and expropriation, Israel managed to grab over 30% of the West Bank for exclusive Jewish use. In the Gaza Strip, Israeli Colonies cover 53.8 km². This area is occupied by only around 7,000 colonists.

Jewish colonies are scattered all over the West Bank and lie predominantly to the south along the coast in the Gaza Strip. Successive Israeli governments have encouraged the development of specific blocks more than others. In the West Bank, **the focus has been on the following areas:**

- The Jerusalem area to create demographic barricades in front of any Palestinian claims to it,
- Along the West Bank's western edges so as to make the return to the 1967 borders practically impossible, and so as to make the colonies appealing to colonists, who commute to work inside Israel
- The Jordan valley for its presumed importance to Israel's security as well as for its agricultural resources.

Furthermore, the growth of colonies is mainly geared to the formation of blocks; i.e. they grow outwards and towards each other. The end result of such a growth is the grouping of Palestinian towns and villages into three or four cantons. Indeed, the Israeli intention is to make the contiguity of any Palestinian State in the future practically unattainable.

The Labor and Likud Israeli governments have maintained progressive expansions of these colonies. To achieve this goal, they have confiscated Palestinian land, demolished their houses, and uprooted thousands of trees. Since the signing of the Declaration of Principles in 1993 and until August 2001, more than 239,434 dunums of land have been confiscated, more than 376,403 dunums have been threatened, over 674 houses demolished and 282,113 trees have been uprooted in the West Bank alone. The reasons given for these activities include:



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building without a permit, the Absentee Law (which states that land not in use for three continuous years is subject to Israeli confiscation), and security purposes. At the Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ), the change in the size of West Bank colonies is monitored by satellite. Table 3 presents the growth of Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Table 4: The growth of Colony Area in the West Bank

Year	Colony Area (sq. km)	Percent of the West Bank
1997	108.9	1.9 %
1999	147.8	2.6 %
2000	150.5	2.7 %

The colonies vary in size, function, and type. Some are big and have acquired city status (e.g. Ariel, near the Palestinian town of Salfiet) while others are small and amount to no less than a few caravans and a water tank (e.g. Magen David, south of the Palestinian village of Yatta). The Israeli colonies differ in their functions too. The difference stems from the fact that colonizing activities in the West Bank and Gaza serve a prime Israeli political objective; dominating the demographic and economic aspects of Palestinian life.

The great majority of colonies are situated in militarily strategic locations (e.g. Ariel has a strategic view over the Jordan Valley and the North). Some of the colonies overlook major Palestinian towns (e.g. Psagot over Ramallah). On the other hand, some act as wedges between Palestinian towns (e.g. the Gush Etzion block separating Bethlehem from Hebron). Colonies are categorized mainly as urban, agricultural, industrial, and military. Thus the type of structures and their numbers differ from one colony to the other. The urban ones may have buildings with several stories while the agricultural have large tracts of cultivated land. They also have barracks and other structures that accompany agricultural activity. Hence the difference in type entails a difference in density and effect on the surrounding. The industrial type for example comprises a more serious threat to the Palestinian localities than the other types.

Prime Minister Sharon's administration has declared that they will not shy away from building in colonies in order to accommodate their "natural" population growth. But table 6 below shows clearly that the growth of the colonist population is far from natural. The tax breaks and cheap housing serve as good material incentives, in addition to the ideological drive means huge numbers of Israelis are moving into the occupied territories each year. It seems likely that this is the growth that the Sharon government will build to accommodate.



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The Myth of “Natural Growth”:

Figures released recently by the Israeli Housing and Construction Ministry show the public construction of 1,943 housing units in the occupied territories in the year 2000, while Labour Prime Minister Barak was in power. This is the highest number since the now Prime Minister Ariel Sharon (Likud) served as housing and construction minister in 1992 (*Haaretz March 5th 2001*).

By taking a look at the population growth in the last few years one observes the following:

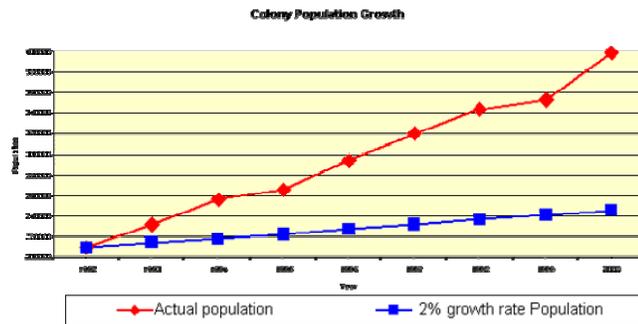
The average growth rate for Jews in Israel is 2.0% per year (the rate including non-Jews is 2.5% per year). However, the population of the Jewish colonies grows at around 8.5% per year, which amounts to over four times the Israeli growth rate. Between 1996-98 there were 130 colonies that had an average annual growth of over 2%. That means that over 80% of the colonies grow at rates higher than the overall Israeli average.

Table 6: The Growth in Population:

Year	Israel		Jews only		Colonies in WBS	
	Population in thousands	Growth	Population in thousands	Growth	Population in thousand	Growth
1993	5327.6	---	4335.2	--	116	--
1994	5471.5	3%	4441.1	2%	128	10%
1995	5612.3	3%	4522.3	2%	133	4%
1996	5757.9	3%	4616.1	2%	147	11%
1997	5900.0	2%	4701.6	2%	160.2	9%
1998	6041.4	2%	4785.1	2%	172.2	7%

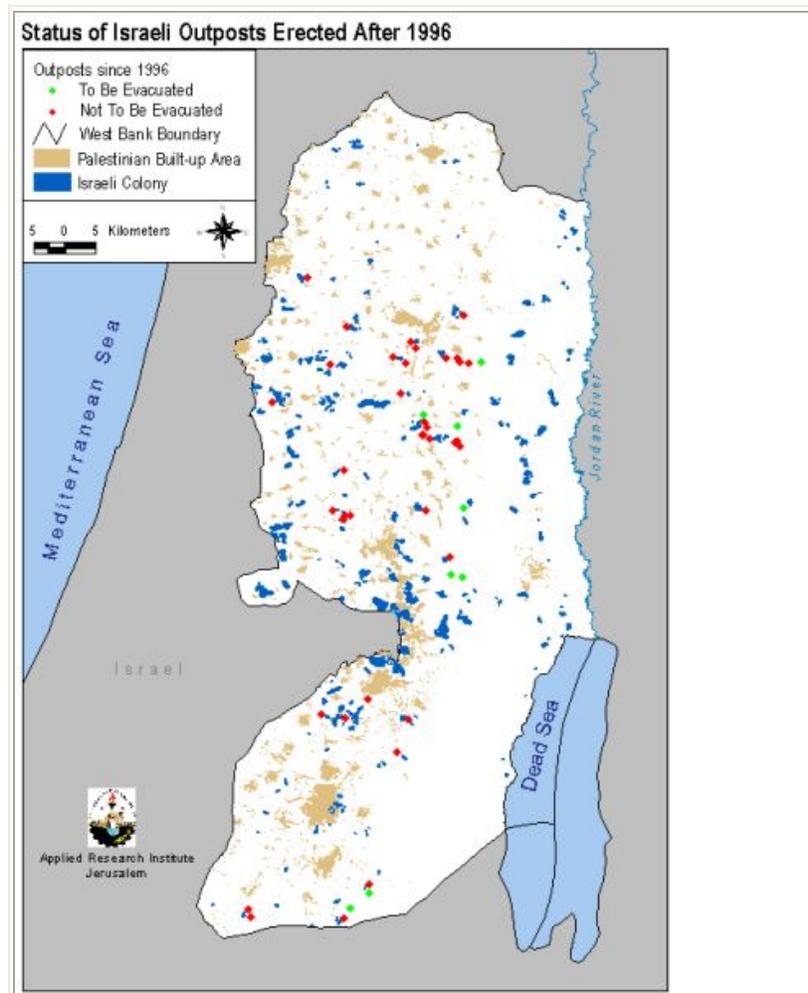


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The “Illegal” Outposts:

In a bid to show that its policy is different from that of the preceding government, Barak’s government revised the status of 42 colonial outposts established after the signing of the Wye River Memo, ([see figure 9](#)).





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The military establishment had advised Barak to dismantle 15 of the 42 outposts since they had legal problems:

- 8 outposts had proper permits,
- 27 had improper or incomplete permits,
- 7 had no permits at all.

Nevertheless, on October 13, 2000, a compromise was reached between the government and the “Yesha” Council (speaking on behalf of the colonists) over the fate of those outposts. **The number of outposts slated for removal was narrowed down to ten of which:**

- 5 were empty or unmanned sites (i.e. containers or water tanks),
- 3 were relocated to nearby sites,
- 2 to be evacuated at a later time.

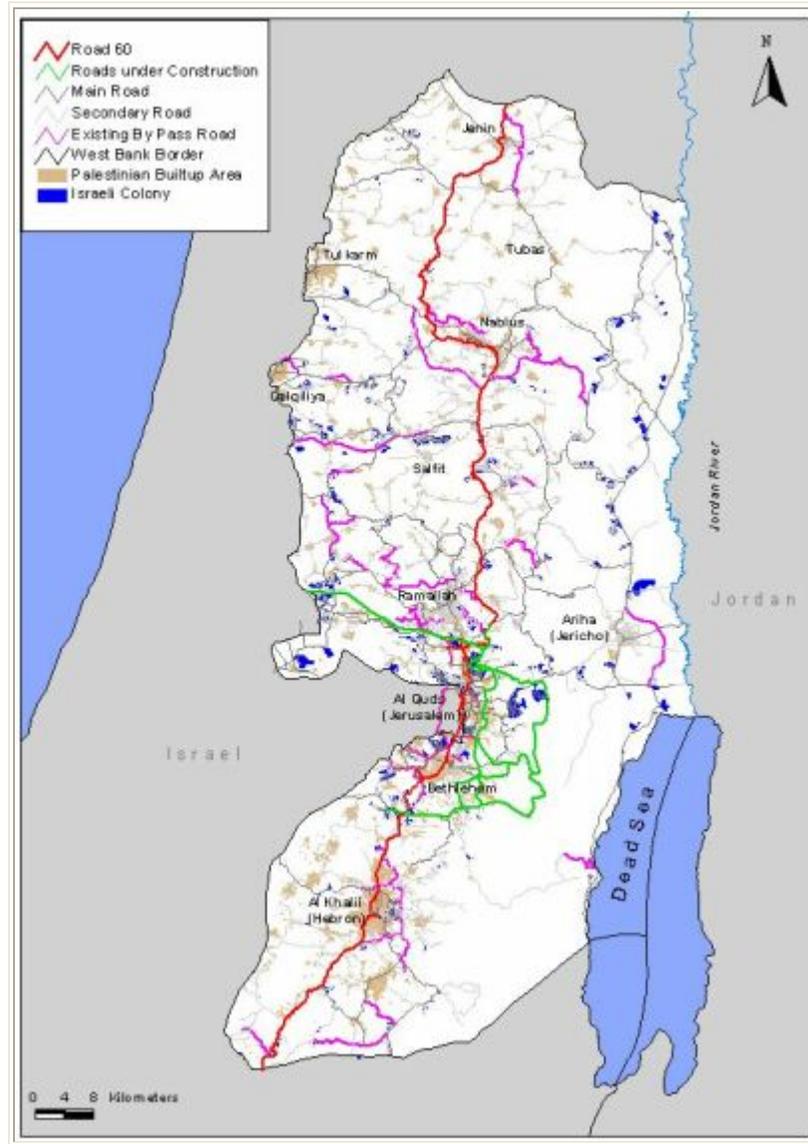
During Sharon’s premiership, 15 new outposts have been erected.

Bypass Roads:

The term bypass roads came with the advent of the Oslo Accords and were not present before that. [Figure 10](#) marks those roads built by the Israelis since the Oslo Accords. These roads are used by the Israelis to link colonies with each other and with Israel. In the agreements they are called "Lateral Roads" but people usually call them "bypass" roads because they are meant to circumvent (i.e. bypass) Palestinian built up areas. These roads are of course under Israeli control and entail a 50 to 75 meter buffer zone on each side of the road in which no construction is allowed.



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The construction of by-pass roads commonly occurs along the perimeter of Palestinian built-up areas. As a result, these roads carve up the Palestinian areas into isolated ghettos and often deprive Palestinians of vital agricultural land. These practices have fragmented both land and people. This situation is very serious within the major cities of the West Bank where by-pass roads form asphalt boundaries that limit the expansion and development of the Palestinian communities, and further disconnect Palestinian communities from each other (Table 5).

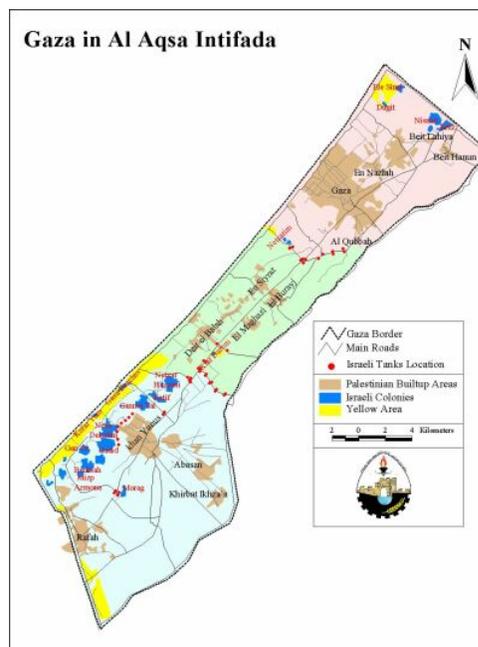


Table 5: Bypass roads’ length and buffer area in the West Bank.

	Existing bypass roads	Planned bypass roads	Total
Total length	315.4 km	261.9 km	557.3 km
Area of the 150m buffer zone	47.5 km ²	39.6 km ²	87.1 km ²
Area Percentage	0.8 %	0.70 %	1.5 %

ARIJ GIS Database

The construction of these by-pass roads requires the confiscation and destruction of approximately 87 km² of Palestinian land, most of which is agricultural. These bypass roads were constructed through a grant from the USA government in order to “help” Israel in complying with the signed agreements and avoid friction between Jewish settlers and Palestinians. The role of the bypass roads became evident during the Intifada where they became the scissors that cut the Palestinian areas into 64 homelands in the West Bank and 3 homelands in Gaza, ([see figure 11](#))





The results obtained for the changes in the by pass roads between August 1999 and October 2000 are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: The Changes in bypass roads between 1999 and 2000 in the West Bank

	Bypass Road	District	Length in kilometers
1	West of Negohot	Hebron	1.9
2	West of Adora	Hebron	4.7
3	Close to Shima	Hebron	3.2
4	South of Dolev	Ramallah	2.2
5	South of Shilo	Nablus	2.3
6	Between Barqan and Alei Zahav	Nablus	8.0
7	North of Maale Amos	Hebron	1.7
	Total		24.1

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Closed Military Areas and Military Bases:

Currently 999.1 km² of the West Bank is declared as closed military area by the Israelis, i.e. 17.6% of the total land area of the West Bank. With the signing of the Sharm El Sheikh Memorandum, an additional 1214.7 km² was declared as closed military areas. In addition military bases in the West Bank cover a total area of 37.9 square kilometers. 2.27 km² of the Gaza Strip is taken up by a military base, a further 53.69 km² is occupied by the Israeli security zone. The closed military areas are mainly found in the Jordan Valley. Although most of these areas have low agricultural value, they constitute the major grazing areas in the West Bank.

Uprooting of Trees and Deforestation:

Afforestation programs in the West Bank and Gaza were first implemented during the British Mandate and it accelerated during the Jordanian Administration, but were stopped completely following the Israeli occupation. According to a recent study by the Ministry of Agriculture, the total forest area within the officially designated areas decreased from 300,736 dunums in 1971 to 231,586 dunums in 1999. More than half of the decreased area was in Gaza, where 95% of the forests disappeared (from 42,000 dunums in 1971 to 2,000 dunums in 1999). About 80%



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of destroyed areas of official forest are attributed to the Israeli occupation as a result of establishment of military bases (2%) settlements (78%) and by-pass roads (less than 1%). Only 35 % (80,101 dunums) of the current 231,686 dunums of official forest area is accessible to the Palestinians, 14% of which were cut down by local people and 6% of the forest has changed to private ownership. The Israeli army and the Jewish settlers have uprooted close to three hundred thousand fruit trees mainly olive trees

Moreover, the Israeli authority has also completely destroyed large Palestinian agricultural fields containing thousands of dunums of agricultural products. These actions are probably the most environmentally damaging of all the current Israeli army activities. Between September 2000 and March 2001 a total of 2975 dunums of land were shaved by Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip (Israeli army uses this expression “shave” to indicate complete removal of any living thing from the surface of the area). The documented cases of cleared land from trees in the Palestinian territories already reach 271,797 trees (Report by the Palestinian Ministry of Agricultural).

The indirect impacts on agriculture have also been very severe. As a result of the closure, farmers have been prevented from reaching their fields and have been prevented from taking their goods to market. The agricultural inputs have become less accessible and more expensive, and transportation costs (in those cases where transport is possible) have risen. In those cases where it has been possible to sell the produce, farmers have often been forced to sell their crops at much reduced prices. The value of losses has been huge.

Furthermore, Israel declared 48 nature reserves in West Bank with a total area of 330,700 dunums or 5.68% of the West Bank. These nature reserves are mostly distributed over the Eastern Slopes and the Jordan Valley. Palestinians question the ecological value of these nature reserves and see it as a means to deny them their rights to their land

Conclusion:

It is important to recall here that United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 " emphasize the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace in which every State in the area can live in security and affirms that the fulfillment of Charter principles requires the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East **which should include the application of both the following principles:**



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- Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict;
- Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force;"

These resolutions also " affirm further the necessity for achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem; and requests the Secretary General to promote agreement and assist efforts to achieve a peaceful and accepted settlement in accordance with the provisions and principles in this resolution;

"All Israeli colonies in the West Bank and Gaza are illegal according to International Law. Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention specifically states that: *"The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies"*.

For the Palestinians, "Madrid" and "Oslo" heralded the prospect of a State, and guaranteed an end to the occupation and a resolution of outstanding matters within an agreed time frame. Palestinians are frustrated at the continued growth of settlements and at their daily experiences of humiliation and disruption as a result of Israel's presence in the Palestinian territories. Palestinians see settlers and settlements in their midst not only as violating the spirit of all agreements ratified by both sides, but also as an application of force in the form of Israel's overwhelming military superiority, which sustains and protects the settlements.

Furthermore, the ongoing fragmentation of Palestinian land and communities into disconnected cantons combined with the frequent collective punishment of closures, house demolitions, withdrawal of identification cards, the confiscation of private property will and the military bombardment of the past year impose a physically unsustainable situation.

Any resolution to the conflict should not take into consideration the facts that Israel has illegally created on the ground (as they are always manipulated by Israeli colonization and occupation policies) but should take into account justice as a premise for sustainable peace. It is becoming clear that the solution for the conflict requires the dismantlement of all colonies as well as the displacement of the colonists without any exception, including what the Israeli government alludes to as "neighborhood". This is not unrealistic, unthinkable but inevitable. Israel can easily absorb the 400,000 settlers inside Israel. As a matter of principle, Israel should not be allowed to get away with its defiance of the international legitimacy



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and thus, the American attempt to consolidate the settlements will not be acceptable to Palestinians.

Israel has recognized the geographical integrity of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, i.e. there should be tangible contiguity between them. This contiguity could be achieved through minor territorial exchange and dismantlement of Jewish colonies to facilitate the absorption of Palestinian returnees.

To reiterate, a lasting peace can only be based on United Nations Resolutions 242 and 338, in which a fully sovereign Palestinian state will be established based on the Palestinian land occupied by Israel in 1967, neighboring a secure and independent Israeli state. For Israel to demonstrate its readiness to comply with these resolutions and the Mitchell commission report, **Palestinians need to see actions on the ground including:**

- Lifting of the one year old blockade imposed on Palestinians
- Abolition of the closed areas orders including the separation zones
- Total freeze on all settlements expansions and by pass roads construction
- Beginning of dismantling settlements in hot spots such as Gaza and Hebron
- Dismantlement of all illegal” outposts
- Allowing international inspection of all settlement activities
- Cancellation of all privileges and incentives given to settlers.



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