

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT

A Guide to the Perplexed

Issue 6: How Israel's Settlements Dilemma Arose: A Capsule Summary

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Settlements from 1967 to 1977 Under Labor Governments

- **“From 1967-1977, Labor built settlements mostly in areas” it believed necessary “for Israeli security.” These areas “had few Arabs—the Sinai, Golan, the Jordan Valley—except for East Jerusalem and Hebron/Kiryat Arba... Unlike the Golan and the Sinai, the West Bank and Gaza were heavily populated by hundreds of thousands [now millions] of Palestinians.”¹**

The Gush Emunim Movement and Settlements Under Post-1977 Likud Governments

- **“Another phase of settlement activity commenced in the mid-70’s, with the appearance of Gush Emunim (‘Bloc of Believers’), an organization of Orthodox Zionist pioneers...The Gush conceived of settlement, particularly in the West Bank heartland with its biblical roots, [in messianic terms] as a necessary vehicle for the ultimate salvation of the People of Israel...The declared objectives of Gush Emunim settlement in the West Bank and Gaza were to create a reality that would prevent any future possibility of partitioning the territories, and to bring about their eventual annexation to Israel.”²**
- **Gush Emunim consists mainly of “zealots within the National Religious Party [the NRP],” who supplied settlers seeking to live in areas of biblical significance in the West Bank, often close to areas heavily populated by Palestinians. “The Likud party...is the ideological offspring of the Herut movement,” which had originally “asserted that all of 1917 Palestine, including Jordan, belongs to the Jews by right, and was unjustly divided by the British.” While most Herut and Likud members came to accept the reality of Jordan as an Arab state east of the Jordan River, from the mid-1970’s on secular ultra-nationalists from Herut and Likud who believed in territorial maximalism before all else—now in the entire area west of the Jordan—joined forces with their religious counterparts in the Gush and the NRP to build Jewish settlements throughout the territory. “These ideologies formed the core of a ‘Greater Israel’ movement,”³ also known as the “Complete Land of Israel” movement.**
 - **According to this ultra-nationalist ideology, Israel’s contemporary political borders should encompass the entire biblical Land of Israel, allowing for no territorial compromise whatsoever. The security, political and demographic dangers to Israel of building settlements throughout the West Bank and Gaza—which advocates refer to only by their biblical names, Judea and Samaria—are dismissed by the ultra-nationalist right because they conflict with the zealots’ militant religious and secular ideology.**
- **“With the election of a Likud government in May 1977, and the advent of a peace process with Egypt later that year, the entire settlement picture began to change. While Likud Prime Minister Menachem Begin agreed to evacuate Sinai and remove the Israeli settlements there, he refused to**

abandon Israel's claim to eventual sovereignty over the West Bank and Gaza, where he advocated personal (as opposed to territorial) autonomy for Palestinians."⁴

- **The Likud party's 1977 election platform clearly stated its aims to gain a firm grip and eventual sovereignty over the territories so as to reconstitute the Biblical Land of Israel:** "The right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel is eternal and is an integral part of its right to security and peace. Judea and Samaria will therefore not be turned over to any foreign rule; between the sea and the Jordan will be only Israel sovereignty. Any plan that involves surrender of part of Western Eretz Yisrael militates against our right to the Land [and] will inevitably lead to a Palestinian state..." Accordingly, **Prime Minister Begin radically increased settlement efforts in these territories, launching a massive, heavily subsidized program of settlement construction in the West Bank.**
- **Settlements expanded radically during the years of Likud rule in the late 1970's and 80's, sometimes in unity governments with Labor, and after the Oslo Accords of 1993, under Labor and Likud governments as well.** Post-Oslo Labor governments sought to channel most settlement construction into blocs, mostly closer to the 1967 border, which Israel expected to annex under a future peace agreement. But Labor leaders failed to take into account the extent to which the ongoing settlement campaign, and the military occupation which supported it—and Labor's tolerance for ongoing settlement expansion and bypass road building in other parts of the West Bank and Gaza—undermined Palestinian trust in Israeli intentions for the territory, sabotaging the prospects for a negotiated two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Nor was Labor's expansive definition of the settlement blocs to be annexed under an agreement acceptable to even the most moderate Palestinians, as some of the settlements included in Labor's concept of blocs extended deep into the West Bank, making a territorially contiguous and viable Palestinian state impossible.
- **Outposts—Settlements Not Approved by the Israeli Government—the Nucleus of Future Official Settlements:** In recent years, settlers have established some 96 new settlement 'outposts.' As of July 2004, 51 of those built under Sharon's watch still remain, in violation of Israel's written commitments to President Bush. Of these 51, 12 are in the process of being converted from temporary into permanent structures. These outposts, "sometimes unmanned at first ... may initially have consisted of a few trailers. **With time, these outposts usually assumed the characteristics of permanent towns,**" with government assistance in the form of electric power, water, and IDF protection, and sometimes with retroactive government approval making once illegal settlement outposts suddenly 'legal' under Israeli law. "The [Sharon] government [has] made half-hearted attempts to eliminate these outposts, which [have] created a security burden for the IDF. In a few cases, the IDF clashed with settlers. Illegal outposts that were removed with great fanfare were usually rebuilt quietly afterwards."⁵
- **Settlements Violate International Law: Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza are widely regarded as violations of international law, having been declared illegal by the UN Security Council in 1979.⁶ This applies both to the official settlements and the illegal settlement outposts.**
 - While the International Court of Justice's recent ruling against Israel's building of a barrier mostly on West Bank territory is one-sided and utterly wrong in its slighting of Israel's security requirements and its right of self-defense against non-state terrorism, it is

important to note that even the American judge who dissented from the majority's flawed opinion agreed with the rest of the court on the legal status of the West Bank and Gaza and Israeli settlements there. Explains Doug Cassell, Director of Northwestern University Law School's Center for International Human Rights, who agreed with the American dissenting judge on all major points: "All 15 judges rejected [Israel's] long-standing argument that the West Bank is not occupied territory because there was no sovereign power in the territory before the 1967 war...[and] all 15 judges further concluded that Israeli settlements in the West Bank are illegal. They violate the Geneva Convention's prohibition against an occupying power's transferring part of its civilian population into the occupied territory."⁷

Impact of the Settlements on Israel's Quest for Security and Peace

- **Dror Etkes, Director of Peace Now's Settlement Watch Project:**⁸ "Settlements in the occupied territories threaten our existence as a Jewish, democratic state, weaken the security of Israel, drain our economic resources, undermine our society's moral fiber, and serve to perpetuate Israeli rule over another people in a way that prevents Israel from reaching peace with the Palestinians. The settlements today pose an existential threat to the future of Israel."
- **"Settlements weaken our security"** because each settler, each settlement, and each bypass road connecting Israel to the settlements requires protection from the Israeli military. Our soldiers are required to put their lives on the line every day to defend Israeli communities deliberately placed in the midst of Palestinian population centers in order to break up Palestinian territorial contiguity. *In the West Bank, the Israeli line of defense is roughly ten times longer than the Green Line because of the need to protect the settlements and their supporting infrastructure.*
- **"Settlements also harm Israeli interests by undermining the political authority of moderate Palestinian leaders,"** the sort of leaders who are interested in stopping terror. For these leaders to be able to advance their political agenda, they need to prove to their constituents that a non-violent path of negotiations can lead to a future Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. They are battling every day for the hearts and minds of the Palestinian street. Settlement construction delivers a message layered in concrete and steel that Israel is not interested in negotiations.
- **"Peace Now is concerned about settlements because they work to ensure that Israeli and Palestinian populations are woven together throughout the territories and make it impossible to separate the two societies into two viable, independent states.** This is not an accident. This is the result of deliberate planning by the settlement movement and its supporters in different Israeli governments over the years, especially our current Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon.
- **"Despite the fact that settlements are a significant obstacle to peace, there is no moral equivalence between settlements and terrorist attacks.** At the same time, in a process that is supposed to see Israelis and Palestinians exchanging land for peace, settlements have a lot to do with what Israel is supposed to deliver through negotiations to the Palestinians, but has largely not provided."

Longstanding U.S. Opposition to Settlements

For more than 25 years, every U.S. administration, both Democrat and Republican, has regarded settlements as a security liability for Israel and an obstacle to future prospects for achieving peace. At the same time, Israeli settlements do not excuse Palestinian violence against Israelis, particularly terrorist attacks that have claimed hundreds of Israeli lives.

- As far back as 1980, then-Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, under President Jimmy Carter, noted that “U.S. policy toward the establishment of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories is unequivocal and has long been a matter of public record. We consider it to be contrary to international law and an impediment to the successful conclusion of the Middle East peace process.”
- President Ronald Reagan articulated his own opposition to settlements on September 1, 1982, when he stated that “further settlement activity is in no way necessary for the security of Israel and only diminishes the confidence of the Arabs that a final outcome can be freely and fairly negotiated.”
- Nearly a decade later, on May 22, 1991, then-Secretary of State James Baker III, under President George H. W. Bush, commented that, “Every time I have gone to Israel in connection with the peace process...I have been met with the announcement of new settlement activity. This does violate United States policy. ...I don’t think there is a bigger obstacle to peace than the settlement activity that continues not only unabated but at an enhanced pace.”
- President George W. Bush’s October 2002 “Road Map” for Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking, drafted in consultation with the so-called Quartet (the U.S., UN, EU, and Russia) called, in the first phase of the plan, for a removal of all outposts established since Prime Minister Sharon took office, and in the plan’s second phase, for a freeze on all settlement activity.⁹
- Most recently, **Secretary of State Colin Powell, appearing at a meeting of AIPAC, said that settlement activity conducted by Israel was not in line with U.S. President George W. Bush’s vision for the Middle East. “Settlement activity by Israel is inconsistent with President Bush’s two-state vision,” he said. (Ha’aretz, 3/31/03).**
- President Bush has publicly stated that “Israel should freeze settlement construction, dismantle unauthorized outposts, end the daily humiliation of the Palestinian people and not prejudice final negotiations with the placements of walls and fences.” (Ha’aretz, 11/20/03)^{*}
- **“The United States is ‘disappointed’ that Israel has not dismantled all the settlement outposts, and the issue is an ‘irritant’ in US-Israeli relations that hurts Israel’s image more than anything else, Abraham Foxman, Anti-Defamation League national director, said in Jerusalem. Foxman’s comments at a press briefing came a few days after US Secretary of State Colin Powell expressed annoyance during a press conference with Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom in Washington about the pace of Israel’s dismantling of the outposts.” (Jerusalem Post, July 8, 2004)**

^{*}For a Peace Now perspective on Israel’s separation barrier, see *Myths and Facts Issue #5: Objections to Peace Now: The Fence and Disengagement*

To learn more, please see other issues of **Myths and Facts About the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict**:

Issue 1: Settlements and Disengagement from the West Bank and Gaza

Issue 2: The Failure of the Road Map and Empowering Palestinian Moderates

Issue 3: Palestinian Attitudes Towards Peace with Israel and the Question of Yasser Arafat

Issue 4: Why the Oslo Peace Process Failed: A Way Out of Israel's Current Impasse

Issue 5: Objections to Peace Now: The Fence and Disengagement

Issue 6: How Israel's Settlements Dilemma Arose: A Capsule Summary(current issue)

To learn more about Peace Now's approach to security through peace for Israel, please visit <http://www.chicagopeacenow.org/> and <http://www.peacenow.org/>

Chicago Peace Now, the Chicago-area affiliate of Americans for Peace Now (APN), is a Zionist organization that affirms the right of Israel to exist in peace and security as a democratic Jewish state. We believe that the only durable settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a two-state solution between Israel and a territorially and economically viable non-militarized Palestinian state. Shalom Achshav—Peace Now—was founded in 1978 by 348 reserve officers of the Israel Defense Forces who believed that only a negotiated end to the conflict in the Middle East could bring true security to Israel and her people.

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About the Authors:

Mark Rosenblum is the Founder and Policy Director of Americans for Peace Now (APN), the leading American Jewish organization promoting Middle East peace, and the sister organization of Israel's Shalom Achshav movement. Mr. Rosenblum is also a historian at Queens College of the City University where he is the Director of the Michael Harrington Center and head of its Middle East Project.

Mr. Rosenblum has spoken and written extensively as a Middle East political analyst. His radio and television appearances include The Larry King Live Show, CBS and NBC evening news, CNN, and National Public Radio; he is currently a Middle East analyst for MSNBC. His most recent writings have been featured in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Boston Globe*, *Miami Herald*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the *Washington Jewish Week*. He has been frequently cited as a Middle East expert and quoted by leading newspapers including the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post* and *Ha'aretz*. He is completing two forthcoming books, *Two Jerusalems, One Peace: Capitalizing on Reality* and with Gidon D. Remba co-editing *From Baghdad to Jerusalem: A New Road to Middle East Peace?* In 1999, the *Forward* newspaper selected Mr. Rosenblum as one of the fifty most influential American Jews.

Gidon D. Remba is a political analyst, commentator and writer on the ethics and politics of the Arab-Israel conflict, and President of Chicago Peace Now, the local affiliate of Americans for Peace Now, which supports Israel's largest peace group, Shalom Achshav. His essays have appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, the *New York Times*, the *Nation*, the *Jerusalem Report*, *Tikkun: A Bi-Monthly Critique of Jewish Politics, Culture and Society*, *Chicago Jewish News*, *JUF News* and other periodicals. With Mark Rosenblum, Founder and Policy Director of Americans for Peace Now, he

is currently co-editing an anthology titled *From Baghdad to Jerusalem: A New Road to Middle East Peace?* Mr. Remba has appeared as a featured guest on various radio interview programs devoted to the Middle East, including National Public Radio's Worldview.

Mr. Remba served as Senior Foreign Press Translator in the Israel Prime Minister's Office from 1977-1978 during the Egyptian-Israeli Camp David peace process. He translated the Knesset speeches of Prime Minister Menachem Begin, Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan, and Defense Minister Ezer Weizman, as well as Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Rabin and other Israeli leaders for the foreign press during the period from Egyptian President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem until the Camp David Peace Accords. He co-translated Sadat's Knesset speech into English for the world press.

To learn more, please visit <http://www.chicagopeacenow.org/bureau.html#GDR>

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¹Joseph Alpher, "Settlements and Borders in Israeli-Palestinian Relations"

²Joseph Alpher, "Settlements and Borders..."

³Ami Isseroff, Mideast Web, http://www.mideastweb.org/map_israel_settlements.htm

⁴Alpher, "Settlements and Borders..." Additional material contributed by Benjamin Solomon.

⁵Ami Isseroff, Mideast Web

⁶In UN Security Council Resolution 446 (1979), from 22 March 1979, The Security Council, "Determines that the policy and practices of Israel in establishing settlements in the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967 have no legal validity and constitute a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East." UN Security Council resolutions are, of course, binding under international law. This resolution was adopted 12-0, with 3 abstentions; significantly, the US was among the three abstainers. It did not veto the resolution or require it to be rewritten to remove the declaration that Israeli settlements are illegal. For the full text of the resolution, see <http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/1979/scres79.htm>

⁷Doug Cassell, "The Barrier: A Wall Between Israel and the World's Opinion," *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 2004.

⁸Dror Etkes, "Testimony Before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Near East Sub-Committee," Oct. 15, 2003. For full testimony visit <http://www.peacenow.org/nia/pr/10152003.html>

⁹APN Policy Paper "Justifying and Structuring An Extraordinary Aid Package for Israel" at <http://www.peacenow.org/LnGrntees/index.html>

Recommended Reading

To learn more about the history and ideology of the Israeli settlement movement and Gush Emunim, see the following:

- Robert I. Friedman, *Zealots for Zion: Inside Israel's West Bank Settlement Movement* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992)
- Ian S. Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1988)
- Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)
- Ian S. Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 352-438;
- Mark Tessler, *A History of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).