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A New Wave of Settlement Building in the West Bank: Israel's Settlers' Government Seizes Palestinian Land

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Introduction¹

Settlement building is a systematic practice and central feature of Israeli policy in the occupied West Bank. Through this multi-purpose colonialist practice, Israel seeks to expand beyond the boundaries gained by the Jewish state during the 1948 *Nakba*. To achieve this, the State of Israel seeks to seize and annex the greatest amount of land with the least amount of inhabitants.

Today, the number of official settlements in the West Bank is 144,² including sixteen in Jerusalem. In addition to this, more than 100 “unauthorized settler outposts” are scattered around the occupied West Bank, as well as in the heart of Arab quarters and neighborhoods in occupied East Jerusalem. By mid-2012, 550,000 Israeli settlers inhabited these settlements and settler outposts, with over 200,000 settlers in Jerusalem alone (Jerusalem was unilaterally annexed by the State of Israel in 1967).³

Since Benjamin Netanyahu’s election as prime minister in March 2009, however, the coalition government effectively became a “settlers’ government” *par excellence*, particularly since the inclusion of far right political parties. This is reflected in the unprecedented speed of settlement building. Today, the Palestinian people are, in effect, singled out and isolated, and their property is threatened with systematic confiscation. In expanding its settlers’ activities in the occupied territories, Israel capitalized on the international community’s preoccupation with the “Arab Spring” and its ramifications, as well as the Palestinian leadership’s inability to come up with any unified decisions or a strategy of resistance.

¹ This analysis was written prior to the Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi’s dismissal of Cairo’s top two generals and his quashing of a military order that had curbed the new leader’s powers.

² For more on “settler outposts” in the West Bank and the role of the Israeli government in encouraging their development, as well as their establishment on privately-owned Palestinian lands, refer to the [Talía] Sasson Report (Jerusalem:2005).

³ Figures indicating the number of settlements and Israeli settlers inhabiting them are taken from various sources, including the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (www.cbs.gov.il/shnaton62/st02_13.pdf); the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/settlmt2011a.pdf); Peace Now (online) (www.peacenow.org.il/node/297); and the Ir Amim website (www.ir-amim.org.il/?categoryID=464).

This paper sheds light on recent developments in settler activities and settlement building encouraged by the government of the State of Israel in the occupied West Bank since 2009. These developments, this paper will show, aim to alter geographic and demographic realities, impose *de facto* realities, and force the Palestinians into cantons and isolated pockets resulting in a potential outburst of violence.

The Most Severe Wave of Settlement Building

Settlement building activities and the construction of housing units for settlers in the occupied West Bank witnessed a noticeable increase of 20 percent in 2011 compared to the previous year, with more than 1,850 housing units built in various settlements in the occupied West Bank in 2011⁴ (making the total number of housing units built in the 2010-2011 period over 3,500).⁵

It is noteworthy that the construction of housing units is taking place in various parts of the West Bank. Settlement building activities include:

- the expansion of settlements and settlement blocs reflecting their constant state of “natural” demographic growth;
- extensive construction projects west of the Israeli Separation Wall, effectively annexing over 9 percent of the occupied West Bank;
- the expansion of isolated settlements lying to the east of the Separation Wall. The construction of housing units in these settlements constituted over 35 percent of the total number of units built in 2011; and
- the expansion of “unauthorized settler outposts,” which are illegal according to Israeli law. These outposts are scattered throughout the occupied West Bank.⁶

Plans for settlement building and the expansion of existing settler outposts witnessed a noticeable increase in the first half of 2012. On February 22, 2012, for instance, the Israeli government decided to build 695 new housing units in various settlements in the

⁴ This is in addition to settlement building activities in occupied East Jerusalem, which the latter section of this policy paper will address.

⁵ For more, refer to: “A Summary of Settlement Building [Activities] in 2011” (in Hebrew), *PeaceNow*, <http://www.peacenow.org.il/2011summaryHeb>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

occupied West Bank, especially in illegal “settler outposts”.⁷ Moreover, in the beginning of June 2012, the government decided to build another 851 housing units in Jewish settlements in the West Bank.⁸ In a similar vein, the Israeli Ministry of Housing proposed a plan to build 800 housing units in the Givat Zeev settlement to northwest of Jerusalem in an attempt to connect it to other Jewish settlements north of occupied East Jerusalem.⁹

Moreover, the Israeli Ministry of Housing proposed a plan to build 942 housing units expanding Gilo, a settlement whose center lies within the administrative boundaries of the city of Jerusalem, which itself was unilaterally annexed by the State of Israel in 1967, and extends into the occupied territories of the West Bank. The proposed expansion, however, includes the construction of housing units on land lying outside the boundaries of the annexed city of Jerusalem.¹⁰

This new wave of settlement building, which can be seen as part of a comprehensive Israeli strategy in the occupied West Bank, seeks to isolate Palestinians and limit their existence within the boundaries of the towns and villages in “Area A” and “Area B” according to the Oslo Agreement. In doing so, more than 60 percent of the West Bank – classified as “Area C” according to the Oslo Agreement – is effectively being seized by the State of Israel.

Furthermore, several indicators reveal the State of Israel’s intention to treat the West Bank in general, and “Area C” in particular, not as occupied territories, but as disputed territories under *de facto* Israeli control. Among these indicators, the following are noteworthy:

⁷ PeaceNow, “The Netanyahu government approves the building of 500 illegal housing units in Shilo” (in Hebrew), *PeaceNow*, February 22, 2012, www.peacenow.org.il/PlanShilo.

⁸ Barak Ravid, “Netanyahu decides to build 851 new housing units in the West Bank” (in Hebrew), *Haaretz*. June 6, 2012, www.haaretz.co.il/misc/article-print-page/1.1725508/.

⁹ Tamar Levy, “The Ministry of Housing makes plans to connect Jerusalem and Giv’at Ze’ev” (in Hebrew), *Galei Tzahal* (Army Radio). May 21, 2012, <http://www.glz.co.il/NewsArticle.aspx?NewsId=81716>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

- More than 900,000 acres of land in the occupied West Bank have been placed under the jurisdiction of the Israeli Civil Administration (Ha Minhal Ha Ezrahi), Israel's governing body in the occupied West Bank, as well as the relevant municipal councils. Land grabbed by the Israeli Civil Administration classified "reserve lands" mapped for the prospective settlement expansion;¹¹
- property rights and possession of large amounts of land in the West Bank are transferred to various government agencies in Israel by designating these lands protected national parks, historical sites, and military zones;
- restrictions on Palestinian inhabitants in "Area C" (which is inhabited by around 150,000 Palestinians) have been exacerbated in an attempt to reduce their numbers and, eventually, evict them or encourage their migration. This is evidenced by Minister of Defense Ehud Barak's decision to demolish eight Palestinian villages in "Area C",¹² as well as Israel's decision to raze over 52 Palestinian houses in the Palestinian village of Susya;¹³
- the Israeli Civil Administration enacted a law allowing Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank the right to build roads without obtaining approval from the authorities under the pretext of defending state property;¹⁴ and
- the Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has expressed its commitment to legalizing unauthorized settler outposts in the occupied West Bank. This is evidenced by its adoption of the Levy Report (a report on the Legal Status of Building in Judea and Samaria), published in 2012, with the intention of regularizing and facilitating settler activity in these outposts and elsewhere in the West Bank.

The Levy Report and Settler Outposts in the West Bank

¹¹ Akiva Eldar, "A 'land bank' in the West Bank: Hundreds of thousands of acres mapped for settlement expansion" (in Hebrew), *Haaretz*, March 30, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/1.1675629>. Also, refer to: "Under the cover of 'legitimacy': Designated 'state land' in the West Bank" (in Arabic), *B'Tselem*, March 14, 2012, <http://www.btselem.org/arabic/print/131010>.

¹² Amira Hass, "Barak orders the demolition of eight villages for the purpose of military maneuvers" (in Hebrew), *Haaretz*, July 23, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/misc/article-print-page/1.1783346>.

¹³ Amira Hass, "The [Israeli] Civil Administration orders the demolition of 52 houses in a Palestinian village" (in Hebrew), *Haaretz*, June 21, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/misc/article-print-page/1.1729927>.

¹⁴ Chaim Levinson, "Initiative: Settlers allowed to build roads without acquiring permits" (in Hebrew), *Haaretz*, February 20, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/misc/article-print-page/1.1645669>.

Under pressure from the US administration and the international community during the 1990s, Israel refrained from building new settlements in the occupied West Bank. Nonetheless, in its attempt to seize more land in the occupied territories, the State of Israel has allowed for the development of illegal or unauthorized settler outposts since 1996. Today, the number of unauthorized settler outposts reached a total of 105.¹⁵

In light of continued pressure from the United States and the international community, however, the Israeli government of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon commissioned an official government report on the legal status of settler outposts in the West Bank in 2005. The report was commissioned under the supervision of lawyer and former head of the State Prosecution Criminal Department, Talia Sasson. The findings of the report were published in March 2005 showing in detail that the Israeli government and its various institutions initiated the establishment and expansion of these settler outposts and that over 80 percent of these outposts were established on privately-owned Palestinian land in an unlawful manner.¹⁶

Throughout the past decade, aggrieved Palestinians whose lands were confiscated for the purpose of establishing and expanding settler outposts resorted to the Supreme Court of Justice in Israel in an attempt to remove settler housing units and regain their property. Although the Supreme Court decided that settlement building on privately-owned Palestinian property was unlawful and issued verdicts in favor of Palestinian plaintiffs, Israeli authorities repeatedly delayed the enforcement of these court rulings. Moreover, under severe pressure, Israeli authorities, forced to demolish five housing units in the settler outpost of Givat Haulpana on the peripheries of the settlement of Beit El in June 2012, responded with a decision to build 851 housing units for settlers in an attempt to “compensate” aggrieved Jewish settlers.¹⁷

In addition, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu established the Committee on the Legal Status of Building in Judea and Samaria (also known as “the Outposts Committee”) on February 13, 2012. The three-member Outposts Committee was

¹⁵ For more, refer to: “Settlements in the West Bank: Facts and figures” (in Hebrew), *PeaceNow*, <http://www.peacenow.org.il/node/297>.

¹⁶ Talia Sasson, *Report on Unauthorized Settler Outposts (The Sasson Report)*, (Jerusalem, 2005).

¹⁷ Ravid, *op. cit.*

headed by former Israeli Supreme Court justice and former member of the radical far-right Herut movement, Edmund Levy. Levy is known for his extreme opinions and his unrelenting support for settlers and settlement building activities. Alongside Levy, the committee included two equally extreme members: a former judge and a former diplomat. On June 21, 2012, the committee presented its 89 page report to Prime Minister Netanyahu and appointed Minister of Justice Yakov Neeman.¹⁸

The Levy Report is characterized by its superficiality and abundance of historic and legal fallacies, as well as by its blatant attempt to twist the truth. The underlying conclusion of the report is that international law regarding occupied territories cannot be applied in the case of Israel's occupation of the West Bank since 1967. The report explicitly argues that the West Bank cannot be classified as occupied territories, and, thus, the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention) does not apply. In accordance with this, settlement building in the occupied West Bank is not considered illegal according to the Levy Report.¹⁹

In doing so, the report treats the West Bank not as an occupied territory but as a disputed territory under *de facto* Israeli control, despite the fact that its Palestinian inhabitants do not enjoy legal or citizenship rights in Israel. The report, therefore, recommends that Jewish settlers in these unauthorized outposts not be evicted and that housing units not be demolished. Moreover, the report recommends the legalization of settler outposts in the West Bank and, in return, suggests that aggrieved Palestinians be offered financial compensation as the only option. In addition, the report recommends that all military decrees and martial laws currently applied in the West Bank, on the premise that Israel is an occupying force, be overturned. They also suggest that more settlements be built on confiscated Palestinian lands and recommend that the Israeli government establish "areas of influence" around existing settlements, allowing relevant authorities to expand settlements and settler outposts, respond to settlements' "natural growth" in accordance with settlers' needs without prior government authorization. Finally, the Levy Report recommends that privately owned property in the West Bank be officially registered by its owners with the Israeli Civil Administration within a five year period. Any land not registered within this period, the

¹⁸ The full report (in Hebrew) is available at: <http://go.ynet.co.il/pic/news/09.07.12.pdf>.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 83.

report concluded, should be considered “state land” – in other words, property of the State of Israel.²⁰

Settlement Building in Occupied East Jerusalem

Israel intensified its settlement building activities in various areas within and around occupied East Jerusalem in recent years. These activities included:

- expanding the existing sixteen settlements;
- establishing and expanding settler outposts in Palestinian neighborhoods in the occupied city; and
- planning and undertaking new settlement building projects in various strategic locations besieging the city within a “ring of settlements”.

In this vein, an investigative report published by *Haaretz* revealed that the Municipal Council of West Jerusalem intends to build over 50,000 housing units for Jewish settlers in occupied East Jerusalem.²¹ The report also revealed that more housing units are expected to be built in and around existing settlements, in addition to establishing new settlements in the vicinity of the city and planting settler outposts within its Arab neighborhoods. Plans for the construction of 20,000 housing units (out of a total of 50,000), the *Haaretz* report claims, have already been devised and proposed to the relevant Israeli planning authorities. These authorities, it reported, have already granted most proposed construction plans its approval while more proposals are expected to be revised and approved. Proposals for the remaining 30,000 units, on the other hand, are reportedly being devised and are expected to be presented for approval in the near future.²²

In short, the *Haaretz* report indicates that settlement building activities in existing and proposed settlements and settler outposts in occupied East Jerusalem are in their final

²⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 83-89.

²¹ Nir Hasson, “Jerusalem municipality plans to construct 50,000 housing units in East Jerusalem” (in Hebrew), *Haaretz*, March 11, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/1.1192933>.

²² *Ibid.*

stages of preparation. Proposed and ongoing settlement building activities in East Jerusalem include:²³

- the construction of 30,000 housing units in Gilo;
- the construction of 1,500 housing units in Homat Shemuel – Har Homa (Jabal Abou Ghoneim);
- the construction of 600 housing units in Armon Ha Natziv; and
- the construction of 450 housing units in Neve Yaakov.

Importantly, 2011 witnessed a conspicuous intensification of settlement building activities in occupied East Jerusalem, including Israeli authorities' approval of a plan to construct 3,690 housing units in existing settlements. Moreover, Israeli authorities presented detailed plans for the construction of 2,660 more units to the relevant planning authorities. In addition, the Ministry of Housing procured an additional 2,057 housing units on the market for bidding among contractors.²⁴

Settler Outposts in the Heart of Arab Neighborhoods

In addition to this, the State of Israel intensified settlement building activities with the intention of creating more settler outposts in the heart of Arab neighborhoods in occupied East Jerusalem. In pursuit of evicting Palestinian residents and expanding settler outposts in Arab neighborhoods, various state institutions, government agencies, and settler associations have intensified their cooperation and collaboration. This includes the Israeli Ministry of Housing, the Israel Land Administration, and the Absentees' Property Guardian; settler associations, such as Ateret Cohanim (Crown of the Priests) association, and the Meyashvei Zion (Settlers of Zion) association; and settler real estate development conglomerates, including the El Ad Group.²⁵

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ PeaceNow, "A Summary of Settlement Building [Activities] in 2011" (in Hebrew), *PeaceNow*, <http://www.peacenow.org.il/2011summaryHeb>.

²⁵ For more information on the role of various government agencies in assisting settler associations to build and expand settler outposts in Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, refer to Nir Hasson's thorough and important report: "The State helps right-wing associations to settle in East Jerusalem" (in Hebrew), *Haaretz*, November 5, 2010, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/investigations/1.1228499>.

It is worth mentioning that Israeli occupation authorities, in addition to settler associations and organizations, embarked on planting settler outposts in the occupied Old City of Jerusalem in 1983, especially in the Muslim and Christian quarters. In 1986, these projects expanded to include the Salwan suburb close to Al-Aqsa Mosque. In the past two decades, these settler outposts expanded beyond the Old City and Salwan – especially in the neighborhoods of Jabal al-Zaytoun (Mount of the Olives), At Tur, As Sawana, Ras al-Amud, Wadi al-Joz, Al Shaykh Jarah, Musrara, and Beit Hanina.²⁶

In doing this, Israeli occupation authorities employ various tactics and instruments to expropriate Palestinian houses and property and evict their inhabitants in order to make space for more Jewish settlers. In the forefront of these tactics is the State of Israel's application of the Absentees' Property Law whereby ownership rights are transferred from the Absentees' Property Guardian authorities to the Israel Land Administration and, eventually, to Jewish settler associations.

Jewish settlers also resort to various state agencies in Israel to seize land and houses that, they claim, belonged to Jewish owners prior to 1948. It is widely believed that, in many cases, Palestinian owners are evicted in accordance with court decisions following legal procedures based on forged documents substantiating Jewish settlers' claims. In 2011, for instance, the Israeli government inaugurated 60 new housing units in its second expansion of the settler outpost of Maale Ha Zeitim which lies in the heart of Ras al-Amud. In addition to this, Israel declared its intention to build 55 new housing units in various Arab neighborhoods in occupied East Jerusalem: 18 in As Sawana; 20 in Al Shaykh Jarah (to replace the former seat of the Palestinian Government commissioned by the *mufti* of Jerusalem, Shaykh Amin al-Husseini, in the 1930s. The site was occupied by the Shepard Hotel until its demolition by Israeli authorities a year ago); and 17 in Ras al-Amud.²⁷ There are also plans to establish a new settler outpost within the Karm al-Mufti district of Al Shaykh Jarah. In pursuit of this, the district was placed under the jurisdiction of the Absentees' Property Guardian authorities, who re-

²⁶ For more details on settler outposts in Arab neighborhoods in occupied East Jerusalem, refer to Annex 1 of *Unsafe Space: The Israeli Authorities' Failure to Protect Human Rights amid Settlements in East Jerusalem*, published by The Association for Civil Rights in Israel. The full report (in English) is available at: <http://www.acri.org.il/pdf/unsafe-space-en.pdf> .

²⁷ *Ibid.*

registered it to the Israeli Development Authority. Eventually, the latter leased the Al Mufti district to the Ateret Cohanim settler association.²⁸

New Settlements in Jerusalem

Givat Ha Matos

Israeli authorities accelerated their efforts to establish the new settlement of Givat Ha Matos in occupied East Jerusalem, which sits precisely on land belonging to the Beit Safafa Palestinian suburb of the occupied city. The plan to establish this settlement is divided into three phases. In the first phase, a total of 2,337 housing units are expected to be built, and the second phase involves the construction of 2,600 housing units. In the final phase, a further 1,362 housing units are planned. The first phase of this project has already been granted approval while the second and third phases are expected to be approved by the Israeli planning authorities in the near future.²⁹

Qalandia Airport

In May 2010, the Israeli Minister of Transportation and Road Safety, Yisrael Katz, established a joint committee with the Municipality of West Jerusalem, the Israel Land Administration, and the Israel Airports Authority with the intention of seizing land owned by the Qalandia Airport to the municipality of West Jerusalem.³⁰ Acting upon the recommendations and decisions of the joint committee, the Israel Airports Authority presented a formal request to the Municipal Council of West Jerusalem requesting that land dedicated for the Qalandia Airport be annexed to the municipal territory of West Jerusalem. On February 22, 2012, the Municipality of West Jerusalem's District Planning and Construction Commission approved the request and agreed to re-register the land. In doing so, the land was effectively annexed to West Jerusalem and, thus, to the State of Israel.³¹ The Municipality of West Jerusalem is expected to transform the land –

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ PeaceNow, "A Summary of Settlement Building..." *op. cit.*

³⁰ Yossi Eli, "New Controversy: Atarot Airport" (in Hebrew), *Maariv*, February, 23 2012, <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/339/939.html?hp=1&cat=404>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

which is adjacent to the Qalandia Palestinian refugee camp and lies between occupied East Jerusalem and Ramallah – into an Israeli residential – industrial zone.³²

The E1 Zone

The so-called E1 Zone lies between occupied East Jerusalem and the neighborhoods of Abu Dis, Al Eizariya, Anata, and Al Zaim. The E1 Zone occupies a total area of 12 km², extending between the settlement of Maale Adumim in the occupied West Bank and the settlement of Ha Giva Ha Tzarfatit (French Hill), which lies within the boundaries of occupied (and, in 1967, unilaterally annexed) city of East Jerusalem. This area is strategically significant for the Palestinians as it links the northern and southern parts of the occupied West Bank. Of note, the government of Yitzak Rabin included the E1 Zone within the “sphere of influence” of Maale Adumim in 1994 and proposed the building of a new settlement there. The Rabin government’s plans were frozen under direct US pressure.

In 2004, however, the Israeli Ministry of Housing agreed to build a road cutting across the E1 Zone and proceeded with planning for the establishment of a Jewish settlement there. Once again, US pressure prevented the Israeli government from proceeding with its plans. In 2008, Israeli occupation authorities relocated the Judea and Samaria District Police headquarters from Ras al-Amud to the E1 Zone. Moreover, in September 2009, ministers in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government, alongside members of the Israeli Knesset, participated in a symbolic inauguration of the proposed settlement in the E1 Zone.

Israeli authorities are expected to proceed with their plans to establish a Jewish settlement in this strategic area to include over 3,500 housing units as well as a one million square meter industrial zone, occupying the equivalent of 10,000 housing units. Along with a proposed park serving Jewish settlers from a number of settlements in the occupied West Bank, this project would serve Maale Adumim as well as various Jewish settlements in and around occupied East Jerusalem.³³

³² *Ibid.*

³³ For more, refer to: “The E1 Settlement” (in Hebrew), *Ir Amim* (online), <http://www.ir-amim.org.il/?categoryID=182/>.

Conclusion

Israel places great emphasis on the issue of settlement building in the occupied West Bank – especially in occupied East Jerusalem. This, of course, aims to change the demographic character of a large section of the occupied territories and pave the way for their annexation by the State of Israel. Israel's settlement building strategy involves large sections of the occupied West Bank and aims to expand settlements colonizing the occupied territories in order to impose a *de facto* status quo on the ground. This status quo isolates Palestinians to a minimal amount of land surrounding their cities and towns, and exacerbates the hardships of life in these isolated cantons in order to encourage the mass exodus and emigration of Palestinians from their homeland. In other words, Israel, as an occupying force, has created a complex colonial, settler, military, and administrative reality in the West Bank whereby Jewish settlers are the *de facto* citizens, inhabitants, and beneficiaries of the occupied West Bank. In achieving this, Israel provides settlements with all the necessary means for expansion and development at the expense of the Palestinians and their properties.

Currently, there is no indicator that Israel will change its settlement building policy in the foreseeable future. In fact, the Israeli government's attitude indicates that Israel is intent on proceeding with and intensifying its settlement building strategy more than ever before. It is important to note that this is taking place against the backdrop of unprecedented indifference on the part of the international community, as well as the preoccupation of the Palestinian leadership with the severe financial crisis facing the Palestinian National Authority today.

On the one hand, the international community has repeatedly proven its inability to take any significant step on issues pertaining to the Palestinian questions as a result of international superpowers' biases towards Israel, especially the United States. The Palestinian leadership's reaction to settlement building, on the other hand, continues to be limited to symbolic gestures of protest and dismay, both of which have repeatedly proven to be ineffective. The Palestinian leadership, for instance, intends to resubmit its official request for full membership of the United Nations once again following its failure last year. Moreover, the Palestinian leadership did not capitalize on the gains of the

Also refer to: Efrat Weiss, "Another Settlement in E1" (in Hebrew), *YNet*, September 17, 2009, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3773361,00.html>.

Arab Spring in that they failed to bolster popular resistance and bring an end to security cooperation with Israel. In effect, this has only increased Israel's ability to pursue and develop its settlement building strategy by seizing more Palestinian land and property while Palestinians are being isolated in ever-dwindling cantons.

It must be noted that the incumbent cabinet of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu differs in terms of its position toward settlement building in the occupied West Bank in a number of ways. These can be summarized in the following points:

1. Settlement building is a strategy supported and sponsored by the current Netanyahu government – a government that seeks to create alternative realities on the ground by expanding settlement building activities and seizing Palestinian land. This, it is hoped, would force the Palestinians to accept any solution proposed by the Israeli negotiator. The Netanyahu government, thus, does not pursue any long-term peace arrangements in the foreseeable future, nor does it propose any peace plan for a future settlement of the conflict. In fact, unlike its predecessors, the Netanyahu administration does not speak of a peaceful resolution of the conflict or make any propositions for peace – not even as a mere tactical or political maneuver.
2. The Netanyahu government is intent on expanding settlements on both the eastern and western sides of the Separation Wall. Moreover, it encourages the development of established settlement blocs as well as isolated settlements and settler outposts scattered around the West Bank. This is done with the intention of annexing over 60 percent of the occupied West Bank to the State of Israel in any future peace settlement.
3. The incumbent government is intent on legalizing unauthorized settler outposts, illegal according to Israeli law, and encouraging their expansion in an unprecedented manner. This is in stark contrast to the Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert governments, which often pretended to tackle the issue of unauthorized settler outposts. The Netanyahu government, in contrast, is undertaking all necessary steps to settle the legal status of these outposts, grant them legal cover and legitimacy, and allow for their expansion. It is in this light that the Netanyahu government formed the Outposts Committee.
4. Having said that, it is hard to imagine the Netanyahu government adopting the recommendations of the Levy Report on the Legal Status of Building in Judea and Samaria in its entirety at the present time because this would effectively mean the annexation of the occupied West Bank without granting its Palestinian

inhabitants any legal or citizenship rights. It is particularly unlikely that Israel will adopt these recommendations now due to international and US pressure. Nonetheless, Israel is expected to benefit from the severe political and factional divisions that characterize the Palestinian political system today, the disorderly Arab scene and Arab states' involvement in their domestic affairs in the wake of the Arab Spring, and the international community's disinterest and indifference regarding the Palestinian question. Combined, these factors allow Israel to expand settlement building, intensify the confiscation of Palestinian lands, and replace the Palestinian inhabitants of the occupied West Bank with Jewish settlers. In light of this, some of the Levy Report's recommendations are likely to be adopted by the current Netanyahu cabinet, especially the report's recommendations regarding the legalization of unauthorized settler outposts.