



Molad the center for the
renewal of Israeli democracy

Israel's National Security and West Bank Settlements

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Introduction and key findings

The single greatest challenge to Israel's national security is the conflict with the Palestinians. While it would be mistaken to reduce the entire Israeli-Palestinian conflict to a single factor, the territorial question is arguably the determinative cause underlying the intractability of the conflict. The territorial question, in turn, is inextricably tied to Israel's establishment of settlements – i.e., civilian communities – beyond the Green Line. Yet despite the conflict's influence on Israel's security, and even though the settlements will play a crucial role in determining the future of the conflict, public debate has sorely lacked serious discussion of the settlements' impact on Israel's national security.

This paper attempts to fill the void by providing a comprehensive, fact-based analysis of the implications of the settlement enterprise on Israeli security. The analysis is backed by data and by input from Israel's leading security professionals. The goal of this paper is not to end the debate but rather to spark it – in the hope that, even in the current muddy political climate, it will be possible to responsibly discuss a matter vital to the future of all Israelis.

In Israeli public opinion, the settlements in the West Bank are often portrayed as a first line of defense that enables the residents of Tel Aviv and its environs to breathe easy. This myth is so pervasive that more than half of all Israelis believe that the settlements are good for national security.¹ The origins of this illusion lie in the conflation of two very different aspects of Israel's presence in the Occupied Territories since 1967: military presence and civilian presence. Supporters of the settlement enterprise naturally have an interest in blurring this distinction. Yet in order to seriously consider Israel's possible courses of action regarding the West Bank – cementing control over the area (through annexation) or withdrawing from it (unilaterally or as part of an agreement) – this distinction must be restored in public discourse. Therefore, a major goal of this paper is to establish a clear distinction between Israel's military presence in the West Bank and its civilian communities there.

The data presented in the paper show that far from helping to protect the citizens of Israel, the settlements actually exhaust the country's defense resources. **Israel's top defense experts agree that while the settlements may have helped national security in the past, this is no longer the case.** Having Israeli civilians living throughout the West Bank does not help defend the country; instead, it encumbers the security forces, is a drain on the national defense budget, and complicates the military's work by lengthening the lines of defense. Instead of concentrating on fighting terrorism against Israel, security forces have to divert considerable resources to protecting citizens who have chosen to live in the heart of Palestinian territory.

The choice whether or not to pay this price for the existence of settlements is in the hands of the Israeli public. To make an informed choice, however, Israelis must be able to debate the matter based on serious analysis and the real facts.

¹ According to a Molad poll from 2015.

Molad's analysis reveals the following key points:

Key points:

- **A clear distinction must be made between Israel's presence in the West Bank on the civilian level (settlements) and the security level (the IDF and ISA or Shin Bet).** The settler lobby has invested efforts in blurring this distinction. The result is a public illusion that Israel's security operations in the West Bank are necessarily tied to civilian residence there. In fact, the opposite is true: the settlements do not promote security; rather, Israel's security forces serve the settlements.
- **The basic assumptions of the 1967 Allon Plan have been strategically irrelevant for at least 15 years.** The initial link between settlements and security was forged in the wake of the 1967 war, as part of the Allon Plan to ensure control over territory in keeping with the pre-state Zionist strategy. This security logic, which may have been relevant in the late 1960s, no longer holds water given geopolitical changes in the Middle East, Israel's military prowess, and the altered role of civilian communities in wartime.
- **The settlements hamper Israel's security forces from defending citizens against Palestinian terrorism.** The settlements are an impediment to security both strategically (in terms of overall government policy) and on the operative level (how forces are deployed on the ground):
 - **The settlements have greatly extended the line of defense along which the IDF has to deploy.** According to an extremely conservative estimate, the boundary between Israel and the West Bank is currently five times the length it would have been without the settlements. As a result, having to safeguard Israeli civilians living in the heart of the Palestinian population is a heavy setback to the IDF's ability to protect citizens inside Israel proper.
 - **The IDF has to deploy more than half – at times, even two-thirds – of its active forces in the West Bank.** This is more than the forces allocated to guarding all other fronts put together (Lebanon, Syria, Gaza, and the Jordanian border along the Arava). An especially large contingent is needed to protect the settlements as they form a unique task: guarding civilians living deep within hostile territory.
 - **Contrary to popular belief, the large majority of forces stationed in the West Bank are not engaged in preventing terrorist acts aimed at civilians within Israel, but rather spend their time guarding settlements.** An estimated 80% of IDF forces in the West Bank are allocated to settlement guard duty, while the remaining 20% focus on defending Israel proper (within the 1967 borders).
 - **Despite the proven security benefits of the Separation Barrier, the settler lobby is preventing completion of its construction for political reasons.** That is why 40% of the Barrier remain incomplete 15 years after construction began.

The settlements are also an impediment to the IDF's ability to respond to emergencies; they take a toll on Israel's defense resources; they generate an ongoing conflict between the interests of the settler leadership and the positions of senior defense officials; they compel the IDF to deal with acts of sabotage by Jewish terrorist elements; and they are a divisive element in Israeli society.

This paper is based on research conducted by Avishay Ben-Sasson Gordis, a former IDF Intelligence major and policy analyst with Molad who is currently pursuing a Ph.D. at the Harvard Department of Government. Our analysis of professional aspects of national security concerns relies, inter alia, on conversations and interviews with security and strategy experts including Major General (res.) Amos Malka, Major General (res.) Moshe Kaplinsky, Major General (res.) Gadi Shamni, Major General (res.) Noam Tibon and Brigadier General (res.) Baruch Spiegel. We thank these interviewees, and others, for lending their time and expertise to this project.

Chapter 1:

From strategy to excuse: The history of the security argument

The movement behind Israel's civilian settlement throughout the Occupied Territories has been driven by religious and ideological motivations from day one. The followers of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook settled in Hebron and in Gush Etzion immediately after the 1967 war because they believed God had given them the right to the land. The same belief in their ownership of the land drives the Settler Movement's leadership today. The settlements were first tied to Israel's national security by a Labor government, which hoped to send civilians into the newly-captured territories in order to improve Israel's leverage in negotiations or in a future war.

In 1967, then-Minister of Labor Yigal Allon presented the government with a plan for extensive civilian settlement of the newly occupied territories. Allon, an IDF major general who had headed the Palmach, was highly-regarded as a military expert. Among other things, his plan relied on the logic that had guided the Zionist movement before the state was founded, best exemplified in a quote attributed to Joseph Trumpeldor: "Wherever the Jewish plow plows its last furrow, that is where the border will run". In other words, if you want to control an area, send your citizens to live there. This approach makes sense for a burgeoning national movement that is stateless and competing over territory with another national movement.

Allon proposed that civilian communities be established around Jerusalem and along the east of the West Bank. This was meant to mitigate the problem of Israel's narrow waist, adding a line of defense against an invasion from the east. The idea was to establish Israeli settlements only in areas that were sparsely populated by Palestinians (with the exception of the ways leading to Jerusalem). Another goal of the plan was to create 'facts on the ground' ahead of future negotiations over the 1967 territories, in which some land could be exchanged for a peace deal.² The government did not officially adopt the plan, but it served as a guideline for the settlements established by Labor governments over the following decade. For example, when members of the Gush Emunim movement tried to settle in the northern West Bank, which lay beyond the scope of the Allon Plan, they were stringently opposed by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.³

The political upheaval of 1977, in which the Right rose to power, ushered in a sharp change in state policy. Newly-appointed Minister of Agriculture Ariel Sharon spearheaded a massive wave of settlement construction throughout the Occupied Territories. The goal of sending civilians to live in these areas was no longer commensurate with the security logic of the Allon Plan but expressly political: to thwart the potential establishment of a Palestinian state. To that end, this second wave of settlements was erected along the mountain ridge of the northern West Bank, in the Jordan Valley, and around the Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem. These locations had no clear military advantage; rather, they lay deep within the West Bank, close to Palestinian

² Yeshayahu Folman, *The Story of the Security Fence*. (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2004), pp. 26-34 (Hebrew).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 32. See, also, Eldar & Zertal, *Lords of the Land*. (Tel Aviv: Kinneret-Zmora-Bitan-Dvir, 2004) pp. 294-299 (Hebrew).

The Allon Plan (1967)



Courtesy of Shaul Arieli

communities – which made populating them with Israeli civilians especially dangerous and complicated.⁴

Nevertheless, security was still touted to promote more settlements. Since the establishment of Kiryat Arba near Hebron in 1971, "security needs" were cited as the major justification for appropriating private Palestinian land in order to establish settlements. Israel's High Court of Justice (HCJ) gave its seal of approval to some of these settlements, on the grounds that they provided the IDF with a "loyal civilian rear". This position was overturned in the Elon Moreh ruling in 1979.⁵ As part of Sharon's plan, private land near Nablus was appropriated so that Gush Emunim members could realize their ambition to settle in the northern West Bank. In response to a petition by the Palestinian owners, the High Court ordered that the settlement be dismantled, as it had been established purely for ideological reasons and not to promote national security. This historical ruling relied, inter alia, on the expert opinions of former IDF Chief of Staff Haim Bar-Lev and Major General (res.) Matti Peled, both of whom believed that the settlement would not only do nothing for security, but would actually take a toll on IDF resources.

As this brief chronology shows, the attempt to justify settlements on national security grounds has its roots in the territorial logic that guided the Zionist movement before the state of Israel was founded. Once circumstances changed, this rationale grew irrelevant, yet security is still cynically used as an excuse to grab private Palestinian land. Years of such discourse have cemented the association between settlements and security in the public imagination, while the opposite is actually true: the settlements do not promote Israeli security; the Israeli security forces serve the settlements.

In the second wave of settlement, locations were chosen not for military advantage but for proximity to Palestinian communities - making them especially dangerous and complicated to populate.

Why is the Allon Plan no longer relevant?

While the settlement rationale of the Allon Plan may have made sense in the 1960s and 1970s, it has since lost all relevance. Three historical processes have emptied the security justification for settlements of meaning.

1. From dangerous border to insignificant front: Conventional warfare from the east no longer poses a threat

The original purpose of occupying the West Bank was to create a buffer zone against a potential Iraqi or Jordanian invasion from the east. Based on the experience of the 1948 and 1967 wars, the government wished to expand Israel's narrow central area and be able to hold enemy forces at bay well before they reached the country's borders.

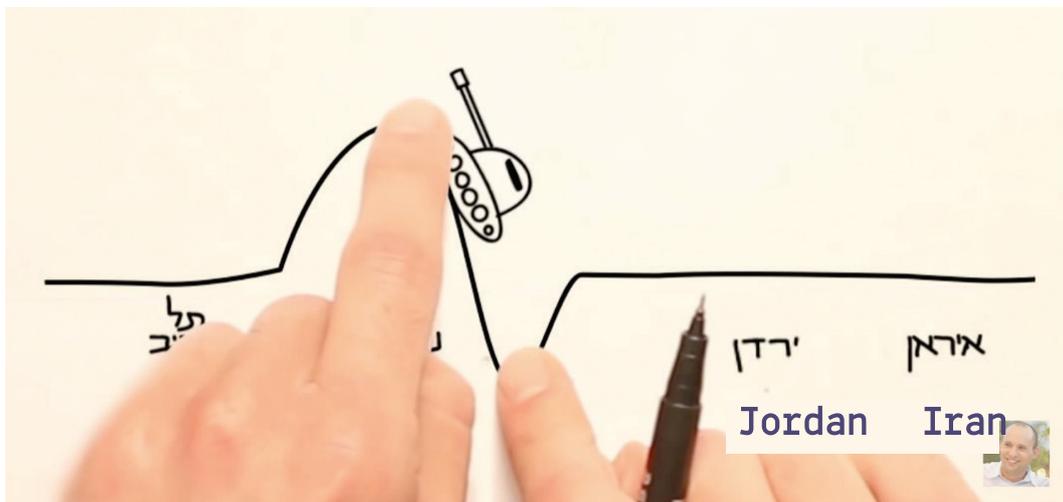
⁴ Folman, p. 4-33.

⁵ H CJ 390/79 – Duweikat et al. v. Government of Israel et al.

Geopolitical changes in the Middle East have since rendered these threats meaningless. Israel has enjoyed a stable peace with Jordan since signing the 1994 peace treaty.⁶ The occupation of Iraq in 2003 by a US-headed international coalition has rendered the Iraqi military threat irrelevant. The major threat that Israel does still face from the east is ballistic fire from Iran – a danger that cannot be mitigated by controlling the West Bank.⁷ For these reasons, the security rationale underlying the Allon Plan is no longer relevant.

Reality notwithstanding, Jewish Home leader Naftali Bennet used an image of an Iranian tank thundering towards Israel as part of his scaremongering campaign entitled the 'Stability Initiative'.⁸ Apparently, the Jewish Home would have the public believe that the settlements are crucial because Iranian tanks are likely to get stuck halfway up the West Bank mountain ridge. This means one of two things: Either Bennett and his colleagues are terrifyingly uninformed, or they have no compunction about lying to the public. Iran is not likely to send tanks rumbling across the desert into Israel. It has much more efficient ways of attacking Israel from a distance, which civilian outposts several miles from the border will be powerless to stop.⁹

Even if Iran's outworn armored fleet were mobilized and sent a thousand of mile away towards Tel Aviv, the IDF would identify and destroy it long before it reached the border. Nevertheless, the Yesha Council (an umbrella organization of Jewish settlements in the West Bank) does not cease to warn us that without the settlements, a ground invasion from the east would begin "a lightning war that would start right in Israel's soft spot – deep within our home front".¹⁰ This is shameless public deception. The IDF will detect a ground offensive long before any tanks roll



Screenshot from a video published by Bennett just before the 2012 elections, illustrating the unlikely scenario of Iranian tanks invading Israel

⁶ The Iraqi threat was greater even before the treaty with Jordan was signed, but since then has remained the only relevant threat.

⁷ Asaf Simhoni, "Strategic depth and the Eastern front", (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2006), p. 31-32 (Hebrew).

⁸ Naftali Bennett's Stability Initiative video (min. 1:09): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n1oFOEY_6IM.

⁹ For example, firing missiles or training and financing proxy forces such as Hezbollah.

¹⁰ Yesha Council, "Judea and Samaria: It's ours, it's essential, it's possible." (Hebrew booklet produced by the Yesha Council).

in, and will certainly not wait patiently at the border before launching a counterattack. With its current firepower, the IDF can thwart a massive invasion from the east long before enemy troops reach the border. Even in the unlikely scenario of a ground invasion of the West Bank, civilian settlements could do nothing to prevent or turn back the offensive.

Let us return to reality. The major challenge that the IDF now faces in the West Bank is not battling ground troops but preventing terrorism. This makes every concentration of Israeli civilians beyond the Green Line especially vulnerable. The settlements do not help the IDF fight terror – they are a milestone around its neck. The settlements are sitting targets that lie close to Palestinian cities or villages, conveniently easy to reconnoiter and infiltrate. Unlike communities in Israel, they do not lie behind a sturdy border but deep within enemy territory. This disadvantage is compounded by the psychological advantage that terrorists reap when they manage to enter a settlement, which is perceived as an IDF failure by both Israelis and Palestinians.¹¹

As former prime minister and chief of staff Ehud Barak explained in an article in May 2017:

"The 'blind spot' in the right's perception of the security task in the territories extends also to fighting terrorism... The security discussion rests on the implicit assumption that continued rule on the ground does not exact a price in the battle against terrorism. The truth is the opposite."¹²

In conclusion, the duty to safeguard Israeli civilians living deep within enemy territory magnifies the IDF's challenges in the West Bank by adding endless points of potential confrontation and raising the chances of an overall escalation.¹³

2. From frontline outpost to security burden: The changing role of Israeli communities during warfare

The Allon Plan was based on the assumption that settlers would help stave off a ground invasion of the West Bank until reserve forces – the bulk of the IDF's fighting power – arrived on the scene.¹⁴ This idea may sound far-fetched in the 21st century, but it was a staple of Israel's defense

11 For further information, see Lieut. Col. Avi Dahan, "Defense in an Age of Limited Conflict", <http://maarachot.idf.il/PDF/FILES/5/110645.pdf> (Hebrew). Two cases in which terrorist infiltration of settlements shocked the Israeli public were the attack on Itamar on 11 March 2011, in which two terrorists killed five members of the Fogel family (see <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4041237,00.html>), and the attack on Kiryat Arba on 30 June 2016, in which a terrorist murdered 13-year-old Hallel Yaffa Ariel (see <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4822376,00.html>).

12 Ehud Barak, "What the Israeli Right Gets Wrong About Security and the Occupation, According to Ehud Barak", *Ha'aretz*, 13 May 2017, <http://bit.ly/2fVgmsf>.

13 For example, the abduction of three Israeli teens in the West Bank in June 2014 led to the launching Operation Protective Edge the following month in Gaza. See Assaf Sharon, "Failure in Gaza", *New York Review of Books*, 2014, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2014/09/25/failure-gaza/>.

14 Aryeh Shalev, *The Line of Defense in Judea and Samaria*, (Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1982), p. 100-102 (Hebrew).

**Former chief of staff
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strategy in the 1960s. Should war erupt, civilian communities were expected to function as fortified compounds that would impede enemy progress until the IDF could deploy accordingly.¹⁵ This strategy has been completely revised in the last few decades. The notion of using civilians on the frontline no longer exists in Israel's military plans. Former commander of the IDF Central Command, Major General (res.) Gadi Shamni, explained this in an interview in 2016:

"The question of whether the settlement project is justified security-wise is no longer relevant. [...]The army can defend the country and its borders without having recourse to settlements. On the contrary: Where there is risk today, we will evacuate settlements to the rear. There is talk of evacuating the communities around the Gaza Strip in the event of another confrontation with Hamas, etc. We evacuated communities in the north during the Second Lebanon War. And there were plans for evacuations from the Golan Heights and from all kinds of places. You don't want civilians on the front line."¹⁶

No military in the world sends civilians into the battlefield by settling them deep in enemy territory. There is a good reason for this: Any civilian who gets embroiled in battle becomes a liability for the military. Two conclusions follow from this. First, the IDF is charged with an inherently contradictory mission in the West Bank – defending settlers while providing maximum security for civilians in Israel. Second, it is in Israel's top security interests to clearly distinguish soldiers from civilians and keep the latter behind fixed, fortified borders.

Former commander of the IDF Central Command Gadi Shamni: "The army can defend the country and its borders without having recourse to settlements. On the contrary: Where there is risk today, we will evacuate settlements to the rear."

3. From Sherman tanks to F-35Is: The IDF's increased capacity

Sceptics would be right to ask what were to happen if the threat of a ground invasion from the east became real again. The answer is that even such a scenario would not necessitate full ground control over the West Bank. As former deputy chief of staff, Moshe Kaplinsky, explained in an interview with Molad, the IDF has developed enough sophisticated firepower and intelligence skills over the last few decades to block an armored advance long before it reaches the border, even without routinely manning the passages leading to the Eastern slopes:

"Thinking of the settlements as a security advantage is anachronistic. That was relevant before the state of Israel was founded, when there were no defined borders and the logic was to gain territory. In the first decades after the state was founded, we didn't have the defense technology

¹⁵ Simhoni, p. 19–20.

¹⁶ Interview with Carolina Landsmann, "The Art of Occupation, According to Israeli General Gadi Shamni", *Ha'aretz*, 15 Oct. 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.747349>.

that we have today. In a country that, at any given moment, is operating three satellites, a huge technological intelligence unit (8200) and many other intelligence services – sitting on one hilltop or another has no effect whatsoever on our ability to defend ourselves, neither in terms of deterrence or to give prior warning.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Interview with Molad, January 2017.

Chapter 2: The settlements as security burden

As detailed above, any advantage that the settlements may once have had for Israeli national security has long since fallen by the wayside. Yet this is about more than a redundant military strategy. The fact is that having Israelis living deep within the West Bank actually holds our security forces back from providing the best defense possible against terrorism.

First, it is important to understand terrorist goals and how Israel's security services can respond to them. Tactically, organizations in the West Bank have three major targets: settlers, Israeli security forces, and concentrations of population within Israel.

There are also three components to the IDF's defense strategy in the West Bank: 1) Controlling the perimeter (i.e., the border around the West Bank, which includes the Separation Barrier and the fence along the border with Jordan) in order to stop weapons, experts, and military knowledge from seeping into the West Bank and to prevent terrorists from entering Israel; 2) Access to intelligence – the IDF and ISA have numerous ways to gather intelligence, including signal interception, human sources, and visual data gathered via aerial photography or surveillance; 3) Operations deep within Palestinian territory, by Israeli or Palestinian security forces.

Over the last thirteen years, Israel's security forces have very successfully thwarted terror attacks coming from the West Bank and reduced their potential threat, especially to Israel's home front.¹⁸ This is the direct result of regular cooperation with the Palestinian Authority's security services, which has tightened over the last decade despite periods of extreme tension between the two parties. Currently, when suspects do not have to be interrogated by Israel, the IDF and ISA pass their intelligence on to PA counterparts who carry out the arrests themselves. The PA also takes proactive measures against terrorism and domestic opposition. This collaborative effort, along with the Separation Barrier, has greatly limited the terror organizations' ability to achieve their tactical goals.

What toll do the settlements take on security?

At present, and in the foreseeable future, Israel's major defense challenge in the West Bank is terrorism, not conventional warfare. The role of the settlements must therefore be weighed against this scenario. As detailed further on, the settlements are detrimental to Israel's security interests both strategically (in terms of overall government policy) and on the operative level (deployment of forces).

¹⁸ See Israeli Security Agency (ISA), 2015 Annual Summary Terrorism and CT Activity Data and Trends, March 2016, <https://www.shabak.gov.il/English/EnTerrorData/Archive/Annual/Pages/2015AnnualSummary.aspx>.

1. Longer lines of defense

Properly protecting the settlements in the West Bank requires massive deployment of forces, as their mission is unique: to secure civilians living in the heart of enemy territory.

This is why the IDF has seven regional brigades operating in the West Bank, all with auxiliary combat battalions (made up of both regular and reserve forces). Added to this are the ISA, Border Police, Israel Police, Air Force and various special units that operate in the West Bank. The tasks assigned to these forces are, among other things: securing settlements, illegal settlement outposts and roads; accompanying settlers outside settlements; protecting Jewish worshippers (for instance, at Rachel's Tomb or at the Tomb of Patriarchs); and protecting Palestinians from Jewish fundamentalist vandalism known as 'Price Tag actions'.

Due to these exceptional circumstances, **the IDF deploys more than 50% – sometimes even 75% – of its regular combat forces in the West Bank.**¹⁹ This is more than the forces assigned to all other fronts put together (Lebanon, Syria, Gaza, Sinai, and the Arava strip along the border with Jordan). Contrary to popular belief, most of Israel's security forces in the West Bank are not engaged in fighting terrorism aimed at citizens within Israel, but in guarding settlers and settlements. As Major General (res.) Gadi Shamni explained:

"If there were fewer Jewish settlers in the [West Bank], there would be less reason for the IDF to be deployed in population centers. Take northern Samaria [the West Bank], for example. There are no settlements there, and where the settlements were evacuated there is less army. Because when you have fewer Israelis, fewer settlements, it's perfectly clear that you need fewer forces."²⁰

An estimated **80% of IDF forces in the West Bank are engaged in safeguarding settlers, and only 20% in defending Israel proper.**²¹ Why does protecting settlements require such massive military presence? Because the settlements have greatly extended the line of defense with which the IDF has to contend. In the West Bank, this line is made up of the Separation Barrier, patrol routes around settlements, roads leading to settlements, and settlers moving outside settlements. A longer line of defense is much harder to defend, and leaves many more spots vulnerable to hostile activity against both soldiers and civilians.²²

This is how Major General (res.) Moshe Kaplinsky described the essential difference between operating beyond a regular border and regularly defending citizens who live behind enemy lines:

¹⁹ This estimate is based, among other things, on the evaluation of Major General (res.) Noam Tibon at the January, 2017 INSS conference. See *Ynet*, 24 Jan. 2017, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4911020,00.html> (Hebrew).

²⁰ Landsmann, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.747349>.

²¹ Molad was provided with these estimates in conversation with Major General (res.) Moshe Kaplinsky and with other security experts.

²² For example, a major consequence of the 1967 victory was that the IDF's line of defense vis-à-vis Arab militaries was shortened, from 985 km to only 650 km, requiring deployment of fewer forces along the border. See <http://maarachot.idf.il/PDF/FILES/7/108187.pdf> (Hebrew). One reason for Ariel Sharon's objection to the Allon Plan was that formally adopting it would require lengthening Israel's lines of defense.

"The point of our being in Lebanon was to provide communities inside Israel with a buffer zone. To stop Hizballah from sitting right by the fence around Metula (in northernmost Israel), we sat a little deeper into Lebanon. But we only held enough forces there to keep Hizballah away. We didn't send in soldiers to give Israeli civilians round-the-clock guard duty so they could drive along roads in Lebanon, have a wedding on top of the Beaufort (an ancient castle in south Lebanon), or worship at a grave along the Litani River."²³

For various reasons, the exact length of Israel's line of defense in the West Bank cannot be calculated but only gauged. Let us start with the Separation Barrier. While the Green Line is 320 kilometers long, the route of the Separation Barrier, which in many places does not follow the Green Line, extends along some 700 kilometers – more than twice the length.²⁴ This disparity, which amounts to almost 400 kilometers – is the result of the government's political decision to include dozens of settlements on the western side of the barrier. As the barrier was extended around these settlements, the resources that the IDF has to allocate them (in terms of personnel, budget, routine engagement, etc.) are several times larger than would have been needed to secure the original border, i.e. without the settlements.

Yet the Separation Barrier may be the least of the IDF's concerns. In fact, most of Israel's military resources go to regularly securing some 80,000 citizens who live in the 70-odd settlements that remain east of the barrier. In addition, the IDF is obliged to defend more than 90 illegal settlements outposts – many of them established in highly vulnerable locations – in which another 7,000 or so Israelis live.²⁵ Safeguarding citizens in the heart of enemy territory is a complex undertaking that requires massive resources. For example, only about 800 settlers and another 250 or so Yeshiva students have taken up residence in the Palestinian city of Hebron. Their presence requires that an entire infantry battalion and three Border Police companies – some 650 people – be regularly stationed in the city. In other words, Hebron has one Israeli soldier or police officer for every two settlers.

In addition to the Separation Barrier and the settlements themselves, the IDF also secures patrol routes around settlements and the roads used by settlers. The paved roads in Area C, most of which serve the settlements, reach a total length of 1,450 kilometers; added to this are the patrol routes around every settlement.

In total, an extremely conservative estimate – excluding unpaved roads and patrols along the outer boundaries of settlements – places the line separating Israel from the West Bank at five

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²³ Conversation with Molad, January 2017.

²⁴ Shaul Arieli, "Israeli Barrier 2012 Status", http://sfilev1.f-static.com/image/users/77951/ftp/my_files/maps_in_english/2012-Barrier-Status.gif?id=10606143.

²⁵ <http://peacenow.org.il/en/settlements-watch/settlements-data/population>.

times greater (at least) than it would have been without the settlements.²⁶ This means that **having to defend Israeli civilians in the heart of Palestinian territory massively impedes the IDF from defending Israel proper.**²⁷

It is sometimes claimed that the settlements constitute a better line of defense than the Green Line or the Separation Barrier. This argument is absurd, simply because the IDF has very little say in shaping this line of defense – in fact, even the government does not really decide the matter. Often, it is the settlers who decide on new locations for settlements, independently erecting illegal outposts despite objections on the part of the government and military. In other words, it is the leadership of the settler movement that shapes Israel's settlement policy and its lines of defense, leaving the IDF no choice but to deploy accordingly, even when the policy flies in the face of the most basic security logic.

A former senior commander who is very familiar with the area illustrated this point with the following anecdote:

"Zambish (Ze'ev Hever, a prominent leader of the settlement movement) took me to this place, about four hours' off-road drive, and said, 'This is the most important spot in Judea and Samaria'. I asked, 'Why?' He replied: 'Because in order to secure this spot, the IDF will have to secure all the others, too.' In other words, if Zambish decided to settle there, that would force the IDF to deploy there, and therefore in the entire surrounding area, which he believes would help defend Israel. Of course, you could pull his reasoning apart in sixty seconds."²⁸

²⁶ The length of the Separation Barrier and roads in the West Bank (some 2,200 km) compared to the length of the Green Line (about 320 km).

²⁷ Similar arguments about the impact of settlement security on the route of the barrier can be found in Shlomo Brom, "The Security Fence: Solution or Stumbling Block?", *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 6, No. 4, INSS, February 2004, <http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/The%20Security%20Fence%20Solution%20or%20Stumbling%20Block.pdf>.

In the paper, Brig. Gen. (res.) Brom states:

"The political changes to the demarcation of the fence have led to the following outcomes: a) The route of the fence has become far longer and more tortuous, which increases the cost of erecting and maintaining it, requires more troops to patrol it, and makes it less effective; b) The fence has and will have a materially adverse effect on the daily routine of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, and therefore has become the focus of Palestinian opposition and a convenient device for anti-Israel propaganda; c) World opinion has concluded that this is a political fence rather than a security fence, intended to create facts that will influence the future of the territories and seize land from the Palestinians."

²⁸ Conversation with Molad, January 2017.

2. Delaying completion of the Separation Barrier

The Separation Barrier is largely responsible for the sharp drop in terror attacks within Israel in recent years.²⁹ Still, it is far from achieving full effectivity: Fifteen years after construction began, only 60% of the approved route has been built.³⁰ The large breaches in the barrier are regularly used by terrorists and criminals to infiltrate Israel and smuggle weapons into the West Bank. These huge gaps exist for political reasons only, due to the presence of Israeli civilians within the West Bank.

First, in certain places, the route of the barrier was planned contrary to defense logic in order to allow for the future expansion of existing settlements. A case in point is the area between Tulkarm and Qalqilya, in which the settlements of Sal'it and Tzufin were established. Several times, the High Court required the government to pull down sections of the barrier that had been built there and to reconstruct them along the original route – i.e., the one based on professional rather than political considerations – after it transpired that expanding the settlements would be unlawful. This cost the taxpayer hundreds of millions of dollars.³¹

Second, three sections of the barrier remain unfinished: in Gush Etzion, in the South Hebron Hills, and near Ma'ale Adumim. It is estimated that thousands of Palestinians enter Israel every week through these gaps – with no inspection, of course. Most of them enter illegally to work, but some also to carry out terror attacks.

In the case of Gush Etzion, the planned route was supposed to almost entirely surround this settlement bloc. However, the barrier was never completed in the area due to strong objection by the settlers, who feared that it would prevent the expansion of nearby settlements and "cut Gush Etzion off from Israel".³² In other words, the settler movement's political lobbying has been delaying completion of the Separation Barrier, a top national security interest, for years.

Fifteen years in, only 60% of the Separation Barrier have been completed. The reason is political: Objection by the settlers, as the completed barrier will cut settlements off from Israel

Another example is the two large gaps that remain in the barrier in the South Hebron Hills due to the government's vacillation over the future of the area. Since land remaining west of the barrier will most probably be annexed to Israel under a future agreement with the Palestinians,

²⁹ The decline in the number of terror attacks within Israel can be attributed to several factors. However, there is a consensus among defense officials over the contribution of the Separation Barrier to preventing terrorist infiltration into Israel. See Folman, p. 218–223. See, also, ISA, "Analysis of Attacks in the Last Decade", for figures on the drop in terror attacks in Israel since the construction of the Separation Barrier began: <https://www.shabak.gov.il/english/enterrordata/decade/pages/default.aspx>. Additional relevant data can be found in Tal Elovits, "Fence Against Terror: The Example of Gaza and the West Bank", *Ma'arachot* 458, p. 10–17, <http://maarachot.idf.il/PDF/FILES/9/113569.pdf> (Hebrew).

³⁰ "Changing the Rules of the Game: A Plan to Improve Israel's Security and International Standing", *Commanders for Israel's Security*, p. 54–56, http://en.cis.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/snpL_plan_eng.pdf.

³¹ Shaul Arieli, "The Price of Greed", *Ha'aretz*, 20 July 2011, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/1.1180940> (Hebrew).

³² Elhanan Miller, "Netanyahu stalling security barrier construction, settler leader claims", *Times of Israel*, 6 October 2014, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-stalling-security-barrier-construction-settler-leader-claims/>.

successive Israeli governments over the past decade have feared the international backlash that would result from altering the planned route. Yet they also feared the wrath of the settler leadership should the barrier be built according to security needs and the land effectively relinquished.³³ Meanwhile, the regional councils on the Israeli side of the barrier are paying a heavy price, along with Israeli citizens hurt by terrorists who infiltrate Israel through these breaches in the barrier.³⁴

3. Reducing IDF combat readiness

In Israeli reality, the military inevitably has to divert some resources to routine security tasks. Still, it is important to note that such tasks compromise the IDF's combat readiness. Until 2002, combat units spent equal amounts of time in training and routine operations. The balance has since shifted, so that now combatants devote 75% of every year in routine tasks – half of them in the West Bank.³⁵

Soldiers who spend most of their time doing routine police work do not have enough time left for combat training. They are also trapped in a structural contradiction between their military training, which has prepared them to exert great force against an armed enemy, and police work, which requires restraint vis-à-vis a civilian population. The artillery and armored corps, which operate essentially as infantry troops in the West Bank, have little chance to practice their designated role in wartime. The disparity between the IDF's routine engagement and its combat readiness was thrown into sharp relief in the Second Lebanon War, when soldiers had to quickly adapt to fighting Hizballah after years of patrolling the West Bank.³⁶

Every settlement that needs protection bogs more forces down in routine tasks, when they could be improving their combat abilities and preparing for an emergency. This stance is often heard from security officials. For example, in June 2016, a senior official at the Defense Ministry remarked that "there is a lot more to be done to prepare for war with Hizballah. The trouble is that we're limited in our ability to train and improve combat skills, because so many of the IDF's

Senior Defense Ministry official: "There is a lot more to be done to prepare for war with Hizballah. The trouble is that we're limited in our ability to train and improve combat skills, because so many of the IDF's forces are allocated to the West Bank"

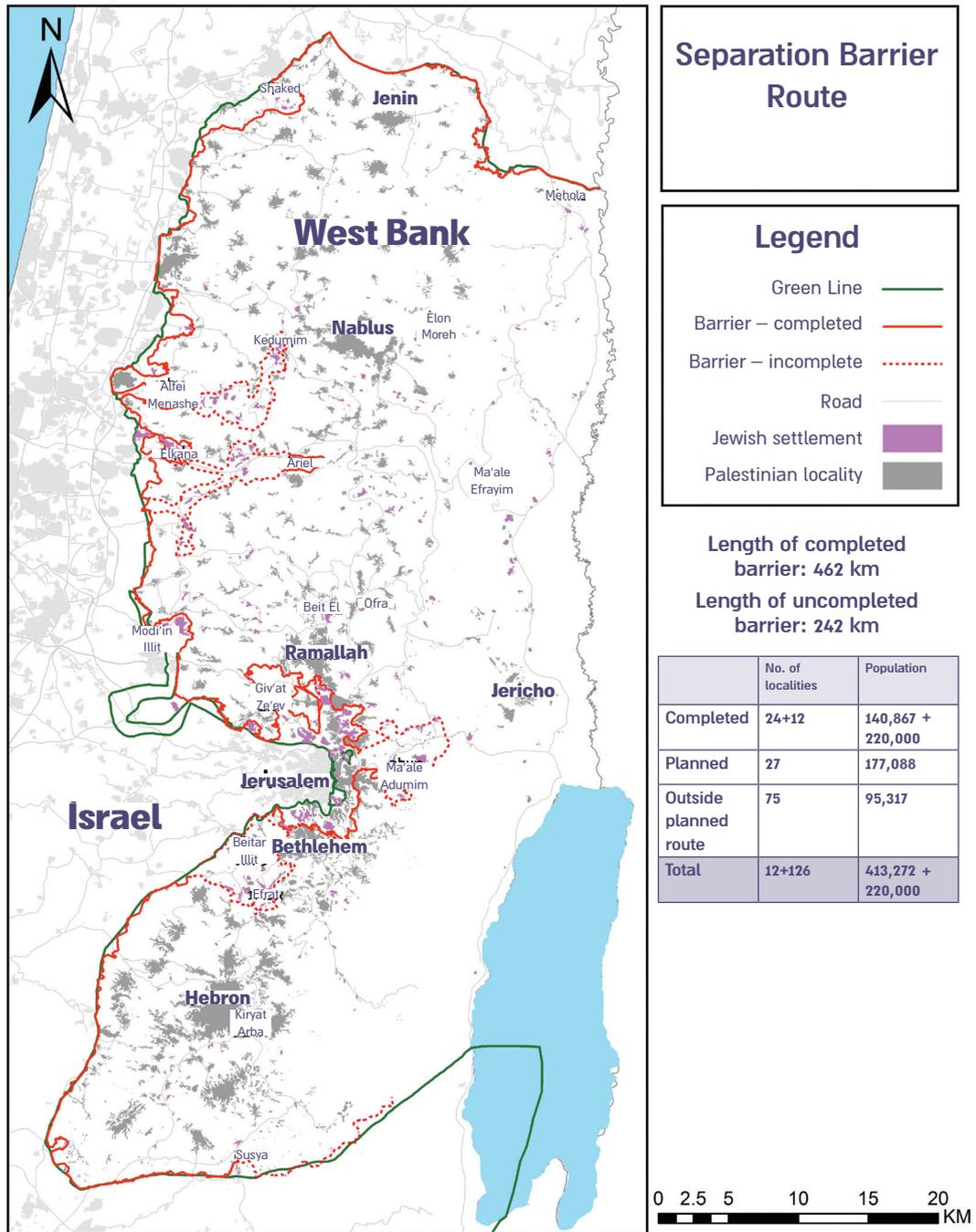
³³ The settler leadership objected to the Separation Barrier even before construction began. For example, in 2002, then Yesha council director general, Adi Mintz, worked to block construction of the barrier. According to *Ha'aretz* (14 June 2002), the council's effort was "to make sure the fence does not go up on the Green Line, so it doesn't become a 'political' separation". Benzi Lieberman, who was chair of the Yesha council at the time, promised "'a bitter struggle" against the government. <http://www.haaretz.com/settlers-lobbying-for-fence-around-area-a-not-green-line-1.42338>. Ariel Sender, a member of the Elqanah settlement council, claimed that "a state that builds a fence between the settlements and central Israel excludes tens of thousands of citizens from the consensus": <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-1939833,00.html>, 21 June 2002 (Hebrew).

³⁴ Examples of terrorist infiltration into Israel through gaps in the barrier abound. They include the stabbing attacks in Petah Tikva and Kiryat Gat on 7 October 2015, <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Initial-Report-Suspected-terror-stabbing-in-Petah-Tikva-421185>, and the attack at Sarona Market on 8 June 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.723941>.

³⁵ Ofer Shelah, *The Courage to Win*, p. 150 (Hebrew).

³⁶ Final Report by the Commission for the Examination of the 2006 Lebanon War, p. 550–552 (Hebrew).

forces are allocated to Judea and Samaria [the West Bank].³⁷ As noted above, he is talking about 50% to 75% of the IDF's combat forces at any given time.



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37 <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4816172,00.html> (Hebrew).

4. Draining Israel's defense resources

As noted, defending settlements requires many more forces to be deployed in the West Bank than would have been needed to defend Israel proper only. The IDF has to use staff officers who have received expensive professional training (such as in intelligence, technology or logistics) for hours upon hours of settlement guard duty, where their unique training is wasted. Also, when regular troops have to be diverted from the West Bank to other tasks (such the 2014 operation in Gaza)³⁸, considerable reserve forces have to be enlisted. This comes at a high cost and severely hampers the country's economic activity.

Defending civilian communities is a basic task of any military, and the costs are inherent to the task. Yet the settlements are unique: In every round of talks with the Palestinians, Israel has acknowledged that many settlements will be dismantled under a future agreement. This means that, at present, Israel is devoting significant resources to defending communities that it has declared will not be part of the country in future. Which particular settlements will be annexed to Israel and which evacuated is still under dispute; however, the public consensus is broad enough to allow serious discussion of the price that Israelis are paying for defending communities that will never be part of the country. At a time when the IDF is dealing with serious challenges on Israel's other borders, while tasked with reducing its combat forces, defending communities that the state admits it has no intention of including within its borders is a rampant waste of resources that are vitally needed elsewhere.

5. Intentionally sabotaging IDF activity

As though defending civilians in the heart of enemy territory were not complicated and expensive enough, in recent years the IDF and Border Police have had to allocate even more resources to dealing with settler terrorism aimed at Israeli security forces and at Palestinians.³⁹ The goal of these acts of sabotage, known as 'Price Tag', is to send a message to the government that dismantling settlements and illegal outposts will be met with retaliation and rioting. As we are by now used to these recurring images of vandalism and violence, it is worth pausing to reflect that although many Israelis disagree with policies that the military implements, this is the only sector of Israeli society that goes to such violent lengths to assert its position.

Contrary to popular belief, "Price Tag" actions did not begin spontaneously, but as part of a strategy set in motion by the heart of the settler establishment

Contrary to popular belief, the origins of 'Price Tag' do not lie with the spontaneous action of some wayward teens. This is a carefully thought-out strategy set in motion by the very heart of the settler establishment – the Regional Councils in the West Bank, which initially also oversaw implementation. The strategy was formulated about ten years ago by the Samaria and Binyamin Residents' Committees – two non-profits established and funded by the Samaria and Binyamin

³⁸ See <http://www.israelhayom.co.il/article/197581> and <http://www.mako.co.il/news-military/security/Article-d56aa5d49f51741004.htm> (Hebrew).

³⁹ Former Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon has reiterated his position that Price Tag actions constitute terrorism. See, for example, <http://www.jpost.com/National-News/Yaalon-Price-tag-attacks-are-acts-of-terror-337527>.

Regional Councils, respectively, to carry out what they, as state-funded entities, could not do. In practice, the committees are funded by the taxpayer and operate as branches of the local government.

Official publications of the Samaria Residents' Committee have clarified the logic of the 'Price Tag' strategy. "It is time to change the way we fight!" declared a committee pamphlet some ten years ago. "This will start a battle on several fronts, and the government will not be able to control it."⁴⁰ Their goal, announced Committee Chair Itzik Shadmi, is to "bring the government down to its knees."⁴¹ In 2008, the Committee presented activists with several ways to wear down the security forces and sabotage their activities: "Instead of concentration the fight at the outpost itself, our efforts must be spread out over as many locations as possible... Blocking several junctions, building outposts and taking teenagers on hikes in unusual places, all at the same time, will create a huge workload for the forces of destruction (the IDF)... In the long run, [the government] will understand that such actions are impossible."⁴² The Committee also initiated and encouraged rioting and erecting illegal outposts, and its leaders even praised damage to Palestinian property and promoted attacks against innocent Palestinians.⁴³

This spirit quickly took root on the ground. Now, almost any attempt to dismantle an illegal outpost comes at the cost of injury to soldiers and police officers, as well as damage to army vehicles and other expensive military equipment. In recent years, Price Tag gangs have carried out a variety of violent activities: setting dogs on soldiers, puncturing tires, vandalizing combat vehicles, breaking into military bases, throwing stones at soldiers and police, and even leaking intelligence from within the IDF in order to sabotage its operations.

While direct attacks on security forces are not a daily occurrence, this fundamental hostility requires the IDF to devote even more attention and resources to the population it is tasked with defending. Moreover, the violence is not limited to security forces. Price Tag actions aimed at Palestinians have included live fire, stone-throwing, damage to property and farmland, and even burning down a house with the inhabitants inside. The routine violence in the West Bank means that the IDF has to devote resources not only to protecting settlers from attacks by Palestinians, but also to protecting Palestinians from attacks by Israelis.

6. Conflict between settler interests and professional defense concerns

Often, the political interests of the settler movement clash with national security needs. As the demands made by settlers are backed by a strong lobby, military and security officials find themselves in a political battle to have their recommendations implemented. Obviously, the military is obliged to carry out the directives of the government. However, it is important to understand that the government often makes decisions that are not in the best interests of national security, but rather are based on the niche concerns of a powerful, organized pressure group.

⁴⁰ "Mutual Assurance is the Key to Victory", Samaria Residents' Committee advert, June 2008, <http://tinyurl.com/nqal545>.

⁴¹ See more details in Project Sixty-One data summary, <http://sixtyone.co.il/price-tag> (Hebrew).

⁴² Cf. footnote 44.

⁴³ For more information see Molad's report on "prince tag" activities: Liat Schlesinger, "At Any Price: Israeli Taxpayers Funding 'Price Tag' Settler Violence", Molad, 13 Aug. 2015, <http://www.molad.org/en/articles/originsofpricetag>.

A glaring example is the establishment of illegal outposts, which is carried out at the behest of the settler leadership without government or military authorization. Once an outpost is erected, it is the military's duty to send soldiers to guard the Israeli civilians living there. This is true even of sensitive locations that require significant deployment, hampering the military from carrying out its tasks.

Other recent examples include the settlers' demand to ban Palestinians from Israeli public transport in the West Bank; their demand to collectively punish the Palestinian population for the wave of terror attacks that began in October 2015; and the threat made by the Jewish Home leadership to create a political crisis if the IDF transfers more authorities to the Palestinian security services.

The settler leaders frequently intervene in internal military affairs. For example, they pressure the political system to prevent the promotion of officers who "strain the relationship between the IDF and the settlers" and press the IDF not to appoint "traitorous" officers as commanders in the West Bank.⁴⁴ They also demand to take part in professional assessments and even state preferences for battalions to be posted in their area. For example, a former senior officer who was a commander in the Hebron area for many years told Molad that the leaders of the Hebron settlement used to significantly pressure the army not to station the IDF's Nahal Brigade in the city, as its soldiers were not considered friendly enough towards the settlers.⁴⁵

7. Damage to national security in the broader sense

Today, it is generally accepted that national security consists of much more than military power. The safety of a country also depends on its status in the international community, on maintaining the rule of law, and on social cohesion. The settlements jeopardize each one of these aspects of Israel's national security.

First, the settlements are the main reason why world opinion of Israel has plummeted, along with its ability to realize international goals. In recent decades, the international community has reached a broad consensus over fully supporting Israel while flatly rejecting the legitimacy of its military control over the Occupied Territories. Since the state was founded, Israel's leaders have known that our economic and political survival depends on strong international backing to make up for the difficult geopolitical conditions in the region.⁴⁶

Yet the settler leadership unabashedly calls for undoing ties with our strategic allies in order to hold on to the West Bank. This is a sharp break with the traditional security conception that helped Israel achieve its vital military advantages. It is also a very superficial view of security: Even from a purely military perspective, Israel's power depends – among other things – on a network of alliances through which capacities are acquired and legitimacy for employing them ensured. A former senior commander whom Molad consulted for this paper emphasized that

⁴⁴ "In Signal to Extremists, Alon Appointed GOC Central Command", *Israel Hayom*, 16 Dec. 2011, http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_article.php?id=2247.

⁴⁵ Conversation with Molad.

⁴⁶ For further analysis, see Molad, "Alliance in Crisis: Israel's Standing in the World and the Question of Isolation", <http://www.molad.org/en/researches/Israels-Standing-in-the-World-and-the-Question-of-Isolation-Alliance-in-Crisis>.

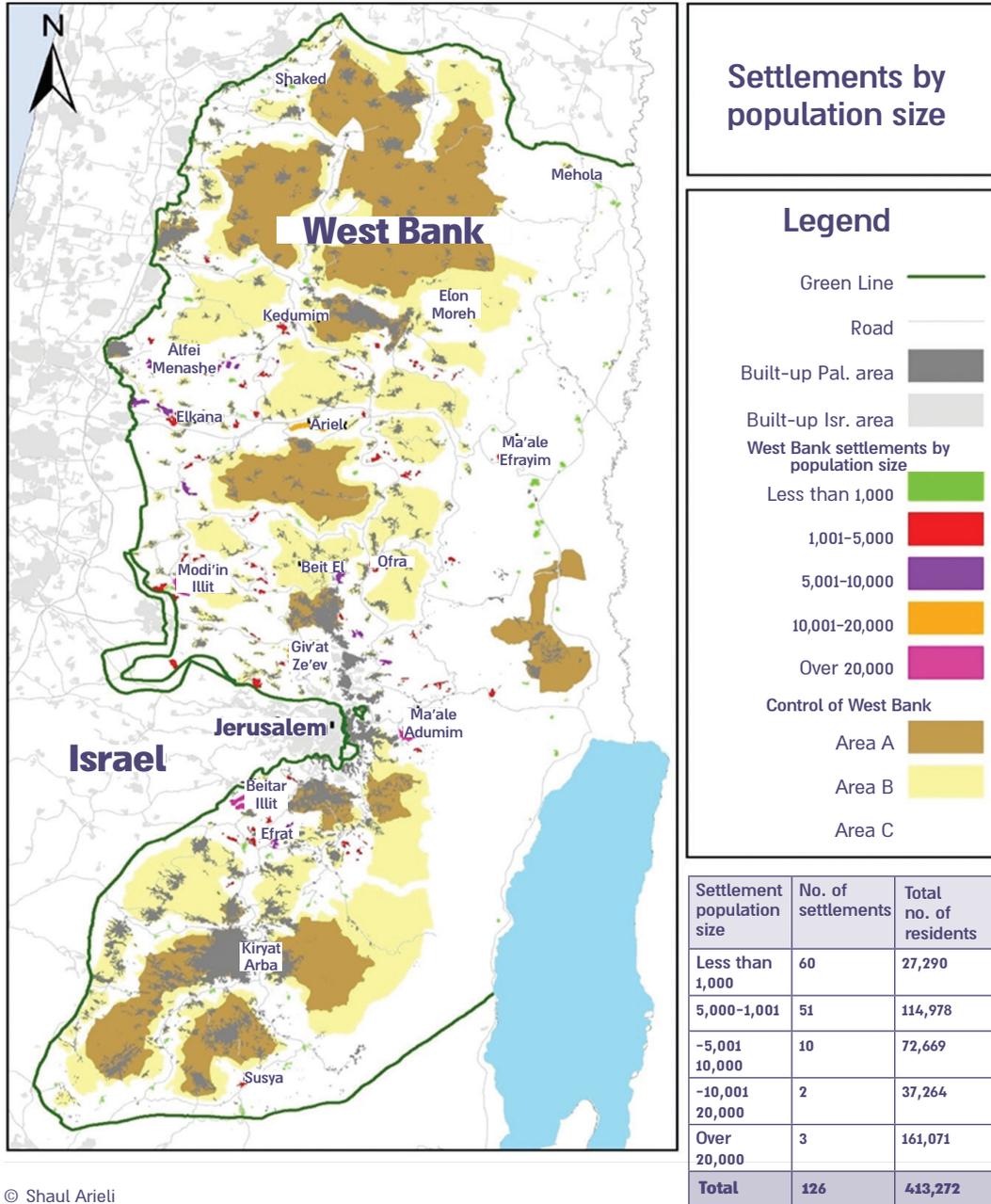
Israel's international status and its peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan are incomparably more important, from a strategic perspective, than the physical advantages of controlling the West Bank.

Second, the settlements systematically undermine Israel's rule of law. The project of settling the West Bank was based on flaunting Israeli law from the outset (the Passover feast held to stake a claim in Hebron, the settling of Sebastia, and later the proliferation of outposts that are illegal even under Israeli law). Forging documents, deceiving authorities, flagrantly breaching the law – all these are what made the massive land grab possible, along with the covert mechanisms for channelling taxpayer funds into the settlements far from the public eye.⁴⁷ The fact that there are currently two systems of law in the West Bank, one for Israelis and the other for Palestinians, demonstrates that the rule of law has been hijacked for the political interests of the religious Right. Moreover, settler groups use various tactics to pressure soldiers into adopting norms of conduct that defy the values and regulations of the IDF.

Finally, the settlements create frequent daily friction with Palestinians and fuel elements that wish to stir up violent Palestinian resistance. They are also a key factor in delaying the achievement of a final-status agreement, which all Israeli governments, regardless of their politics – including the governments of Benjamin Netanyahu – have declared essential to Israel's national security.

The settler leadership calls for undoing ties with our strategic allies in order to hold on to settlements, sharply breaking with the security conception that helped Israel achieve its vital military advantages

⁴⁷ For more information, see Molad, "Secret Settler Slush Fund", <http://www.molad.org/en/articles/slush-fund>.



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Chapter 3:

National security without settlements

The previous chapters detailed why the settlements in the West Bank take such a heavy toll on Israel's national security. Two conclusions follow. First, a clear distinction must be made between Israel's military and civilian presence in the West Bank: the former is good for national security; the latter is not. For years, leaders of the Settler Movement have sought to blur this distinction in order to confer the advantages of having the IDF operate in the West Bank onto the settlements. Using religious or ideological reasons to argue for the settlements is well and good; conflating military activity with civilian existence is rhetorical manipulation.

Second, as long as there is no agreement with the Palestinians, the best way for Israel to ensure national security is to evacuate those settlements that will never be part of the country while retaining military control over the West Bank. From a security perspective, a civilian withdrawal is in Israel's best interest regardless of whether an agreement is reached or not – although it may help pave the way to an agreement. In any case, whether and how an agreement can be reached with the Palestinians is a separate issue. Even those who believe that peace is impossible should be in favor of separating Israel's military presence in the West Bank from the settlements – if they truly care most for the safety of Israeli citizens.

In the following section, we outline how Israel could reorganize its civilian presence in the West Bank while maintaining military control over the area. Note that this is not a detailed program, but rather a sketch of a possible scenario. In all respects it would be better for Israel and the Palestinians to reach an agreement. Such an agreement would include provisions for both civilian and military withdrawal, although the two would not necessarily be carried out simultaneously. Nevertheless, the idea of Israel evacuating citizens from the West Bank is no longer unimaginable: it is being discussed in political circles, would certainly be better for national security than the current situation, and – the thrust of our argument here – it exemplifies the distinction between military and civilian presence.

Until an agreement with the Palestinians, it is in Israel's security interest to evacuate settlements that will never be part of the country and retain military control over the West Bank

1. Scenario: Civilians evacuated, military stays

If no citizens remain east of the Separation Barrier, Israel will be left facing two kinds of security challenges. In the short term, the threats are unlikely to change significantly (except for the removal of settlers from danger). In the long term, it will be in Israel's interest to have a stable, non-hostile Palestinian state next door with which it can maintain healthy economic and security ties. We focus here on the short term, and not on the comprehensive security arrangements that will be part of a future permanent agreement.

In the following, we outline a scenario in which Israelis would be protected from the threats pertaining to the West Bank, while the necessary conditions would be created to enable the establishment of a sovereign, stable, non-hostile Palestinian state.

Our approach is based on recognizing a double failure: both of Netanyahu's policy of 'conflict management' and the interim arrangements under the Oslo Accords. We propose, instead, that a change be made to the single component of Israel's policy in the West Bank that is most harmful to national security – the settlements. We are not calling for another interim agreement, which the Palestinians would be highly unlikely to accept in any case, and which could be derailed under various pretexts such as violation of clauses or pace of implementation. As a civilian withdrawal would precede an agreement, and in any case does not depend on reaching one, the move would be carried out purely in keeping with Israel's interests. However, implementing a policy based on this idea would require coordination with the Palestinians – even if not as part of a formal agreement – rather than unilateral action, and the existing security cooperation should be maintained after the withdrawal.

- **Options: Full control or withdrawing to the perimeter**

There are two ways to protect Israel in the transitional period between the evacuation of settlements in the West Bank and an agreement upon security arrangements with the Palestinians. In the first, Israeli security will continue operations within the current framework, but without the burden of defending settlements. In the second, Israel will draw forces back to the borders of the West Bank, using firepower or incursions into Palestinian territory when necessary. There is a fundamental difference between these two alternatives. In the first, Israel maintains control over all of the West Bank and the Palestinian security services need Israeli permission to operate there. In the second, the Palestinian forces are free to act and Israel decides to intervene as it sees fit. We believe that the first option is preferable, as it will enable progress towards the second – external control only – based on the development of Palestinian ability to control the area effectively.

Alternative A: Continued military control over the entire West Bank

At face value, it would appear that without settlements east of the Barrier, there would be no point in deploying major forces in the West Bank. This would merely arouse resentment among Palestinians, endanger the lives of security forces, and fuel criticism of the occupation. In practice, while it is true that the number of forces can be reduced without settlers, it is important for Israel to maintain a significant military presence in the West Bank as long as there is no stable Palestinian sovereign there. Counterterrorism missions are more efficient and easier to carry out when the IDF is regularly on the ground, instead of having to launch targeted operations or complicated raids into Palestinian territory.⁴⁸ Keeping security in IDF hands and transferring it gradually to the Palestinians will prevent the formation of a vacuum in which the IDF is no longer fully operative but the Palestinian law enforcement agencies are not yet capable of suppressing terrorism or domestic threats.

⁴⁸ The IDF and the government faced a similar dilemma when they had to decide when to act in Area A during the second Intifada, until the IDF regained control of Palestinian city centers in Operation Defensive Shield (2002).

It could further be argued that as long as the IDF is deployed in the West Bank, Israel cannot claim to have ended the occupation. However, the fact is that without an agreement over the establishment of a Palestinian state, there will be no international recognition of an end to the occupation – especially if Israel does not withdraw exactly to the 1949 Armistice Line. As far as the international community is concerned, so long as the Occupied Territories are not under full Palestinian sovereignty and Israel operates freely within them – it is still occupation.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, a crucial lesson of the disengagement from Gaza is that any withdrawal will be met with international approval and garner considerable credit for Israel even if it does not immediately lead to an agreement, as long as it is coordinated with the Palestinians and not carried out as a confrontational unilateral move.

While the number of forces can be reduced without settlers, it is important for Israel to maintain a significant military presence in the West Bank as long as there is no stable Palestinian sovereign there

Even with total military control over the area, the sharp decline in routine tasks will enable the IDF to scale back. Top commanders in the West Bank believe that the IDF will be able to keep only four regional brigades in the area, instead of the current seven.⁵⁰ These brigades will control the area around the Separation Barrier (the 'seam zone') and along the border in the Jordan Valley, will carry out counterterrorism missions based on intelligence, and will keep the peace in Areas B and C until responsibility is transferred to the Palestinian security forces. The brigades will be based close to Palestinian towns, making it easier to launch missions as needed.

Alternative B: Quick transition to military control over the outer boundary only

Another option is for Israel to withdraw military forces to the borders of the West Bank, with increased presence along the Jordan Valley and the 'seam zone'. As with the previous alternative, and unlike the military withdrawal from Gaza, there will be no pretense of Israel immediately relinquishing all control: The IDF will continue to operate in the West Bank as needed. The crux of the move will be drawing back most of the forces and redeploying them around the border. Intelligence, minimal raids and counterterrorist airstrikes will complement defense of the border; special unit operations and raids by larger forces into Palestinian territory will prevent the development of terrorist threats deep within the West Bank.

A clear advantage of controlling the outer boundary is that it will not expose IDF soldiers to the risks entailed in patrolling the West Bank or in regular contact with the Palestinian population. Nonetheless, there are several drawbacks to immediately removing the IDF's massive presence in the West Bank. First, it is doubtful whether the PA will be able to quickly extend its control over

⁴⁹ That was the global response to the disengagement from Gaza. The international community welcomed the step, praised Israel and rewarded it in various ways; however, it was clear throughout that the world would not recognize an end to occupation under these terms (as opposed to Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000).

⁵⁰ One option for redeployment would be a brigade responsible for the South Hebron Hills, stretching until Gush Etzion; a brigade in charge of Jerusalem and Ramallah; a brigade allocated to the Palestinian towns in the northern West Bank; and a brigade responsible for the Jordan Valley and Jericho. Naturally, the details of the redeployment would require thorough planning that is beyond the scope of this paper.

the West Bank to an effective degree. Second, once a line is drawn beyond which the IDF does not routinely operate, it will be more difficult to reach a decision to cross it and greater threats will be needed to justify such a move. One reason is that the forces will be less familiar with the territory and have less control over it than in routine deployment. Third, deploying only along the borders of the West Bank will increase the temptation to use remote fire, of sending soldiers into hostile territory to arrest suspects at risk to soldiers by entering hostile territory. This will probably raise the number of Palestinian casualties and motivate violence.

Given these shortcomings, the IDF should at least initially maintain significant presence in the West Bank. If and when Israel will no longer need routine military operations deep within the West Bank, it will then be possible to withdraw forces to the border area, in preparation for transferring full responsibility to the Palestinians as part of a future permanent agreement. As scaling back forces will not depend on a major bilateral arrangement, the process can be staggered according to Israel's needs, based on a separate assessment of the situation in every area.⁵¹

2. Carrying out a civilian withdrawal

Scope and duration

Many plans have been suggested over the years for drawing borders and coordinating land swaps between Israel and the future Palestinian state. Some, such as the Geneva Initiative and the later Annapolis talks, were serious and thoroughly researched.⁵² Others, such as the proposal to annex Area C, to Israel, are mostly wishful thinking. Almost all professionals who are familiar with the issue agree that some land will be swapped between Israel and the Palestinians, including certain areas on which both sides agree: parts of Gush Etzion, parts of the "Jerusalem envelope" (the seam zone around Jerusalem), and settlements near central Israel. These areas, in which about 80% of the settlers live, will remain in Israeli hands under every scenario.

The settlements that will not remain in Israeli hands in any circumstance – where only 20% of the settlers live – must be evacuated gradually, so that the IDF has time to assume control over them. The withdrawal should begin in locations where evacuating only a few settlements will leave considerable space free for the Palestinians. This was the case, for instance, in the 2005 West Bank withdrawal, when the evacuation of four small settlements paved the way for

⁵¹ Some argue that this solution is not viable, as the Israeli public will not agree to keep troops in area where there are no civilians. Yet almost 20 years of Israeli presence in Lebanon proved otherwise. In the end, the public supported the withdrawal, not because there were no civilians living there, but because the IDF death toll at the hands of Hizballah rose to a degree that Israelis were no longer prepared to tolerate for territory that is not considered part of sovereign Israel. See appendix for a discussion of the differences between south Lebanon and the West Bank, which clarifies why there is no reason to expect a south Lebanon or Gaza type of threat from the West Bank in the foreseeable future.

⁵² See Omer Zanany, "The Annapolis Process (2007-2008): Negotiation and its Discontents" (Jerusalem: Molad & Tel Aviv University, 2015). <http://www.molad.org/images/upload/files/Annapolis-and-its-discontents.pdf>.

economic revival of the entire northern West Bank and a decline in terrorism there.⁵³ In the next stage, the more densely settled areas must be transferred to the IDF.

The limitations of separation

At present, Israel cannot – and should not – disengage unilaterally from the entire West Bank. This can only be possible if the relationship with the Palestinians dramatically changes. Total separation is currently unrealistic for the following reasons:

The PA is not ready to accept full security responsibility. As long as the PA is not capable of assuming full control, Israel will remain in charge of security in the West Bank, although it may reduce its intervention on the ground.

Entering and leaving the West Bank. There is no airport in the West Bank, and the Palestinians do not control the border crossings with Jordan. Therefore, at least initially, they will have to pass through Israel or through Israeli-controlled crossings along the border with Jordan in order to enter and leave the West Bank.

East Jerusalem. So long as the Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem located on west of the Barrier are not under PA control, and their residents are not citizens of a Palestinian state, full separation between Israel and the Palestinians in Jerusalem will be impossible.

Economic implications. The first three problems can be resolved in a final-status agreement. However, the economic ties binding Israel to the Palestinians are too deep to vanish instantaneously without profoundly undermining the structure of the Palestinian economy.

The per capita GDP in Israel is \$34,300, compared to \$4,300 in the West Bank. It is in Israel's clear security interest to reduce this gap

According to the Paris Protocol (the economic annex of the Oslo Accords), Israel and the PA operate under a single customs 'envelope', Israel collects duties and taxes for the Palestinians, the currency in the Occupied Territories is the shekel, and the two economic systems are tied together by an extensive network of connections.⁵⁴ In addition to this institutional structure, the Palestinian economy is entirely dependent on Israel: in early 2016, some 60,000 Palestinians held permits to work in Israel; another 30,000 Palestinians were working in Israel without a permit; and some 27,000 were employed in Israeli-owned industrial zones in the West Bank. Israel's defense officials and the government even voiced support for raising the number of permits to about 100,000.⁵⁵ Furthermore, exports to Israel constitute the bulk of

53 Avi Issacharof, "In Jenin, Once the 'Suicide Bomber Capital', a Fragile Transformation", *Times of Israel*, 25 April 2015, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/in-jenin-once-the-suicide-bomber-capital-a-fragile-transformation/>.

54 See Molad, "The Paris Protocol and the Economic Implications for the Palestinians 1994-2000", <http://www.molad.org/en/articles/the-paris-protocol-and-the-economic-implications-for-the-palestinians>.

55 Amos Harel, "Military Wants 30,000 More Palestinians Working in Israel", *Ha'aretz*, 8 Feb. 2016. <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.702003>.

Palestinian exports,⁵⁶ and even after the campaign in recent years to boycott Israeli products, imports from Israel continue to account for some 60% of all Palestinian imports.⁵⁷

It is in Israel's clear interest to see the Palestinian economy flourish and the gaps between per capita GDP shrink (in Israel, it is \$34,300; in the West Bank, \$4,300).⁵⁸ Persisting gaps will increase Palestinian frustration, leading to larger incentives to attack Israel.

It will take a long time for the Palestinian economy to become independent. This will require investment in locally-owned production and development of relative advantages. In the short and medium terms, especially as long as the Palestinians do not control their foreign trade, the West Bank economy will continue to rely on work in Israel and export of construction and food products to the Arab sector in Israel. Although improved economic conditions will not eliminate all extremist motivations to attack Israel or the secular Palestinian government, it is widely agreed that the opposite will push many Palestinians into the arms of terrorist organizations or to carry out attacks independently.

In light of all this, even after the settlements are evacuated, Israel would do wisely to ensure that Palestinian workers and goods can still enter Israel, rather than turn the West Bank into an isolated enclosure like Gaza.

Strengthening the Palestinian security forces

The PA security apparatuses have undergone a major reform since 2007, under the guidance of former Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. Twenty ineffective mechanisms, which served violent political rivalry among Fatah leaders, have been reduced to eight mechanisms with clearly-defined roles. They are now commanded on a much more professional level and the forces trained under the auspices of the US and Europe. This has made PA counterterrorism operations more effective, as well as the prevention of protest from seeping into Israel and the enforcement of public order.⁵⁹

However, the PA's security and judicial systems has a number of structural problems. First, most Palestinians see the security services as branches of an external power instated to maintain the occupation, rather than as an organic part of Palestinian society (ibid.). This is exacerbated by restriction of their authority to Area A, where, even there, they do not enjoy full control. Palestinians disapprove of the PA for allowing Israel to operate in its territory without demanding sovereignty.⁶⁰ Second, the Palestinian security services systematically suppress any criticism of

⁵⁶ OEC – Palestine, <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/pse/>.

⁵⁷ <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/118611468189870664/pdf/99646-v2-REVISED-9-29-2015-PUBLIC-Box393209B-AHLC-Report-September-2015-final.pdf>.

⁵⁸ CIA World Factbook. The figures for Israel relate to 2015 and for the West Bank to 2014.

⁵⁹ Tartir, A., (2015). "The Evolution and Reform of Palestinian Security Forces 1993-2013", *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 4(1), p.Art. 46, <http://www.stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.gi/>.

⁶⁰ See report no. 28 by the International Crisis Group, "Squaring the Circle: Palestinian Security Reforms Under Occupation", September 2010, pp. 15-18 (Hebrew). <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/98-squaring-the-circle-palestinian-security-reform-under-occupation-hebrew.pdf>

the PA and its leaders, contrary to efforts underway to promote democracy in the PA.⁶¹ Third, Palestinians are wary of the feebleness and lack of professionalism in the Palestinian legal system,⁶² a matter that further detracts from the power of Palestinian law enforcement.

In the short run, these problems are not a threat to Israel's national security. Nevertheless, the fact that the PA security services are seen as pandering to foreign interests weakens their ability to thwart terrorism. Their extensive violation of human rights could also destabilize the PA – although putting an immediate stop to their activities against the opposition would primarily assist Hamas. In any case, Israel must recognize that the solution to these three challenges lies in Palestinian hands. All that Israel can do is provide the Palestinians with the necessary conditions for dealing with them.

To that end, Israel should gradually expand the authorities accorded to the PA security forces in large parts of the West Bank. Without Israeli civilians living in the West Bank, the PA will find it easier to operate outside Palestinian cities, to mobilize forces, and to operate more broadly without having to coordinate with Israel. This will increase their control over the area and improve their image as a sovereign force rather than as collaborators. Meanwhile, the international bodies in charge of training Palestinian internal security forces should emphasize civil values and establish measures for gradually easing the PA's iron fist against opposition in the West Bank.

Empowering the Palestinian security services will come at a cost for Israel. As with the improved coordination on security in recent years, Israel will have to choose when to refrain from independent action in order to allow the Palestinian services to operate alone. In the long term, Israel will benefit from having seasoned security forces operating on the other side of the border with which reciprocal ties can be maintained based on mutual trust. A similar coordination mechanism is one of the factors that helped Israel-Egypt relations weather the political changes in Egypt in recent years, even when the Muslim Brotherhood was in power. To create a similar reality with the Palestinians, there is no choice but to take limited, reversible risks and to reduce Israel's responsibility for maintaining security in the West Bank. In addition, since the measures proposed here are based on security concerns and not on a comprehensive political agreement, there is no need to act under an ultimatum or a binding timetable or even to address all areas of the West Bank at once.

⁶¹ "New Report Documents Abusive Detentions by Both PA and Hamas to Stifle Freedom of Expression", *Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor*, 21 Feb. 2016, <http://www.euromedmonitor.org/en/article/1142/New-report-documents-abusive-detentions-by-both-PA-and-Hamas-to-stifle-freedom-of-expression>.

⁶² Diana Atallah, "Palestinian Justice System Still a Work in Progress", *The American Task Force on Palestine*, 4 March 2013, http://www.americantaskforce.org/daily_news_article/2013/03/04/palestinian_justice_system_still_work_progress.

3. National security 'the day after'

Some on the Israeli Left assume that the minute Israel withdraws all its forces from the West Bank – with or without an agreement – Palestinian terrorism will vanish overnight. This is unlikely. Even though the PA will probably continue to fight terrorism, the threat to Israelis will not immediately disappear. The purpose of maintaining IDF presence in the West Bank is to suppress terrorism until the Palestinians build up their own capacity to do so. The day after redeployment in the West Bank will present Israel with other possible threats, but military presence on the ground will provide an adequate response.

Collapse of the Hashemite regime. The Jordanian regime is one of Israel's closest friends in the region. Cooperation with Jordan promotes basic Israeli interests such as preventing infiltration of terrorism from the east, easing tensions with the Palestinians,⁶³ and bolstering Israel's status in the Arab world.⁶⁴ However, this strategic cooperation has not seeped into popular discourse, and the public mood in Jordan is often anti-Israeli. In view of this, and in light of the large Palestinian population in Jordan, Israel is perpetually on guard against a possible collapse of the regime. This concern has grown since the Arab Spring, and even more so since the rise of ISIS in the countries around Jordan.

Those who oppose an Israeli-Palestinian agreement due to justified concern over the stability of the Jordanian government fear that, should a Palestinian state be established and the Hashemite regime collapse, Israel would have no buffer against military incursions from the east or the infiltration of terrorism into the West Bank.⁶⁵ In fact, establishing a stable Palestinian state is a major interest of the Hashemite regime, so much so that the future of the regime may depend on it. Therefore, concern for Jordan's stability should actually expedite Israel's efforts to promote the establishment of a Palestinian state.⁶⁶

In any case, this problem is irrelevant to the outline presented here, under which Israel retains all its assets for facing the extreme eventuality of the Hashemite regime collapsing. The IDF will continue to operate freely in the Jordan Valley and to defend Israel against threats from the east. The civilian settlements in the West Bank have no role to play in this. As for the threat of a military incursion, as we have seen, this scenario is no longer relevant and the settlements have nothing to contribute.

Hamas takeover of the West Bank. In 2007, Hamas took over the Gaza Strip. Since then, Gaza has become an enemy state in terms of security. This has given rise to concern that the West Bank will also fall into Hamas' hands, by military or political means. A forceful takeover of the West

⁶³ As occurred in late 2015, and again in the summer of 2017, when Jordan helped alleviate Israeli-Palestinian tensions concerning the Temple Mount.

⁶⁴ Jordan played a crucial role in forging the Arab Initiative and has promoted it over the years.

⁶⁵ Eran Lerman & Ya'akov Amidror, "Jordanian Security and Prosperity: An Essential Aspect of Israeli Policy", *The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies*, Perspective Paper No. 323, 27 Dec. 2015, <https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/9583/>.

⁶⁶ Assaf David, "Jordan, the Palestinian Refugees and Kerry's Plan", *The Forum for Regional Thinking*, 21 Jan. 2014, <http://bit.ly/2nmek6g> (Hebrew).

Bank by Hamas was unlikely even in 2007.⁶⁷ Nine years later, due to the Gaza experience, the Palestinian security forces are much more skilled in suppressing internal opposition by Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the like. While the power balance in Palestinian politics could, conceivably, shift radically, having the IDF on the ground, as proposed here, could prevent Hamas from violently taking over the West Bank and deter it from working toward such a goal.

A much more likely scenario is a Hamas takeover of the West Bank by political means. Under Palestinian law, the resignation of President Abbas will not trigger new elections; rather, his position will immediately be filled by the chairman of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Hamas member Aziz Dweik. Should a Palestinian reconciliation occur and elections be held, Hamas may plausibly win.⁶⁸ In such a situation, Israel will have to deal with a hostile regime in the West Bank, too. While a Hamas government may not actively promote terrorism, it is likely not to continue security coordination with the IDF.

Any problem that Israel may face if Hamas takes over the West Bank will be greatly exacerbated by the having hundreds of thousands of Israeli civilians in the heart of a Hamas-controlled area. The settlements will not stop Hamas from winning the elections. In fact, they are a boon to Hamas, as their existence and continued expansion is perceived as a failure of the PA.

The West Bank turning into Gaza. After the disengagement, two major threats developed on the Gaza front: rocket fire and tunnels leading into Israel. As the Palestinian government in the West Bank will likely need more time to become sufficiently effective against all potential threats, it is essential that the IDF remain there for the time being. Here, again, the situation does not call for civilian settlements but rather for military engagement: guarding the border to prevent terrorists from moving between Israel and the West Bank, and targeted counterterrorist operations deep inside the West Bank, with or without PA help. It is also worth mentioning that it is much harder to dig tunnels in the West Bank than in Gaza, for two reasons: Across the border lies Jordan, rather than the loosely-controlled Sinai Peninsula, and the West Bank rock is much harder to excavate than the sand in Gaza.

In general, spokespersons for the Right flatly reject any discussion of settlement evacuation on the grounds that the Gaza disengagement proved how dangerous this would be for Israel. Although the public has largely bought into this campaign, reality proves otherwise. In fact, analyzing the consequences of the disengagement provides support for shortening Israel's lines of defense. From 2000 until the disengagement in 2005, 32 Israelis were killed every year, on average, by Gaza-based terrorism, and the figures were rising. Since 2005, an average of 13 Israeli have been killed a year and the numbers continue to drop, although they include the casualties of three major operations in Gaza, among them the 74 Israelis killed in Operation Protective Edge

⁶⁷ Israel's military control over the West Bank, the relative power of Hamas in Gaza prior to the takeover, and the size of the West Bank compared to Gaza – all these would it make the movement of internal forces that enabled the Gaza takeover difficult or downright impossible in the West Bank.

⁶⁸ In a September 2015 poll, West Bank Palestinians showed a slight preference for Hamas over Fatah in parliamentary elections (35% for Hamas and 34% for Fatah). In the presidential elections, which pit Isma'il Haniyeh (Hamas) against Abbas (Fatah), the former is greatly favored. The most popular candidate in the West Bank is Marwan Barghouti, who is serving five life sentences in Israel. <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/621>.

(2014).⁶⁹ More importantly, the disengagement from Gaza consisted of a military and civilian withdrawal at the same time; here, we are discussing only a civilian withdrawal.

Perception of the move as a "prize for terror". The question of how Palestinians will perceive an Israeli redeployment in the West Bank – an achievement for moderates? for terrorism? – depends almost entirely on how and when Israel chooses to act. If it withdraws after another wave of Palestinian terrorism or another Intifada, this will likely play into the hands of terrorist organizations by showing that Israel only understands force. In contrast, we propose that Israel take the initiative without external pressure and not as a response to Palestinian violence. Instead, the withdrawal would be openly coordinated with the PA, and the move would be explicitly presented as intended to advance Israeli security interests. This may even strengthen Palestinian support for a diplomatic solution with Israel, and alleviate the despair that security experts and senior defense officials claim drove to recent waves of terrorism.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ The connection between the disengagement from Gaza in 2005 and Operation Protective Edge in 2014, with its dreadful results, is not as clear-cut as detractors of the disengagement make it out to be. The choice to launch the operation and the way it was run appear to be more closely tied to the government's policy in the years after the withdrawal from Gaza. For Molad's analysis, see Assaf Sharon, "Failure in Gaza", *The New York Review of Books*, September 25, 2014. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2014/09/25/failure-gaza/>. For more on the strategic benefits of the 2005 disengagement see Molad's report "The Strategic Balance of Israel's Withdrawal from Gaza", from August 2016: <http://bit.ly/2xbKFeg>.

⁷⁰ Barak Ravid, "IDF Intelligence Chief: Palestinian Despair, Frustration Are Among Reasons for Terror Wave", *Ha'aretz*, 3 Nov. 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.683860>.

Summary:

The battle over security

Solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the most crucial issue that Israeli society is facing. In addition, what Israeli voters care about most is national security. It is, therefore, both vital and politically prudent to responsibly address these related matters. This may seem obvious, yet for fifteen years, the Center-Left bloc in Israeli politics has given a wide berth to the hottest subject in Israeli politics. The disengagement, Iran's nuclear program, operations in Gaza – on none of these has the Center-Left presented a clear view that is discernible from that of the Right. This is especially jarring given that the defense establishment almost unanimously supports the basic principles of this political bloc, and offers its full professional backing.

As we have seen, the initial link between settlements and security was forged immediately after the 1967 war, as part of the Allon Plan. The plan was based on the territorial rationale that guided the pre-state Zionist movement. While this security logic may have made sense in the late 1960s, geopolitical changes and Israel's military prowess have emptied it of any strategic relevance today.

The settlements do not add value in terms of security. In fact, they are a heavy burden on Israel's security forces in the West Bank. This is primarily because they lie in the very heart of hostile territory, and therefore massively extend the IDF's line of defense – to five times longer than the line would be without settlements, according to a conservative estimate. This forces the IDF to allocate most of its fighting power to the West Bank, more than on all other fronts together. Moreover, contrary to the prevailing view, up to 80% of the forces stationed in the West Bank are engaged in guarding the settlements, while only 20% are assigned to thwarting terrorism against communities within Israel.

It is vital, politically, to draw a line between Israel's civilian and military presence in the West Bank – the security forces provide security for Israel; the settlements harm Israel's security – since the Right often cites security as a reason for supporting the settlements. This distinction can also serve as a basis for operative plans. To illustrate this claim, we presented a scenario of civilian redeployment in the West Bank along with continued military control. We believe that this is not an optimal scenario, and an agreement with the Palestinians would be much better. Yet it is undoubtedly preferable in terms of security to the current situation.

The debate over the future of the Occupied Territories, which has been going on for half a century, is thorny and complicated. At present, however, even the most

The Center-Left is avoiding the most important issue for Israelis – security. This is especially jarring given that the defense establishment almost unanimously supports the basic principles of this bloc

Once religious-Right arguments are stripped of their military camouflage, we are left with an ideological debate that can easily be won. After all, the vast majority of Israelis do not share the Messianic vision of the settler movement

fundamental aspects of this debate are based on rhetorical manipulation and public deception. Most of the defense arguments cited by the Right to justify settlements are, in fact, ideological or religious claims translated into the national security discourse. Once these claims are stripped of their military camouflage, we are left with an ideological debate that the Center-Left can win with relative ease. After all, the vast majority of Israeli citizens do not share the Messianic vision of the settler movement.

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