

ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS

Historical Background

The State of Israel was founded after the United Nations passed Resolution 181 that partitioned the British Mandated Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state. The Jews accepted the plan, but the Arabs rejected it. Israel declared its Independence on May 14, 1948 and was attacked by Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. The Arab campaign to destroy Israel failed. Although the Arab countries signed armistice agreements with Israel in 1949, they did not accept the Jewish State of Israel. Egypt occupied the Gaza Strip and Jordan occupied the West Bank. This new boundary was marked as the 1949 armistice line, also known as “the Green Line.”

In June, 1967, Egyptian troops massed near the Israeli border, U.N. peace keepers were expelled by Egypt and Syrian troops were prepared for battle along the Golan Heights. Egypt closed the Straits of Tiran to all Israeli shipping cutting off Israel’s only supply route with Asia. When diplomatic efforts failed, Israel had no choice other than to take preemptive action as a matter of self defense. Israel was attacked by Jordan, Syria, Egypt, and Iraq. Israel fought off all invaders. At the signing of the Six Day War ceasefire Israel controlled the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, and the Golan Heights. These areas, which are past the “Green Line,” contain the “settlements.”

Occupied Territories vs. Disputed Territories

While the Arab world uses the term “occupied” territories, Israel prefers to use the term “disputed” territories because of the complexities of the situation. Politically, the West Bank and Gaza Strip is best regarded as territory over which there are competing claims which should be resolved in peace process negotiations. Israel has valid claims to title in this territory based not only on its historic and religious connection to the land, and its recognized security needs, but also on the fact that the territory was not under the sovereignty of any state and came under Israeli control in a war of self-defense, imposed upon Israel. At the same time, Israel recognizes that the Palestinians also entertain legitimate claims to the area. The very fact that the parties have agreed to conduct negotiations on settlements indicated that they envisage a compromise on this issue.

Israel and its neighbors differ in their understanding of UN Resolution 242, a blueprint for peace that was drafted after the Six Day War. The resolution calls for (i) Withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict; (ii) Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.” This resolution was adapted after drafts which called for withdrawal from “all territories” and “the territories” were rejected. Arab countries believe that the resolution still calls for the removal of Israel from all territories taken during the war. Israel believes that the resolutions specifically left out words “all” or “the” with the belief that new borders would be created that would enable Israel and its neighbors to live in peace.

Reasons for Settlements

Israeli leaders established settlements because of the strategic military significance they offered. Israel is a very small country and the pre-1967 borders made it very difficult to defend itself. At its narrowest point Israel was only 9 miles wide, an enemy soldier could have stood on a hilltop in the West Bank and shot down airplanes landing in Tel-Aviv at Ben Gurion airport. Settlements would provide a buffer to prevent such events from occurring. Additionally settlements help protect key military installations in the West Bank. Today there is debate within the government as to whether or not settlements continue to provide a security benefit.

Religious Jews moved to settlements because they believe that the Land of Israel was given to them by G-d and it is their duty to return Israel to its Biblical borders. Jews have lived in the Gaza Strip and West Bank from time immemorial.

Some Israelis, who took advantage of government incentives, moved to settlements close to the Green Line primarily for economic reasons.

Settlements vs. Outposts

According to Israeli law, settlements are recognized by the government, while outposts are viewed as illegal. The decision to establish a settlement must be made by the authoritative political echelon and should only be established



with the approval of a detailed plan and must be built on State land. Settlements range in size from small villages to cities of 45,000 residents. Approximately 190,000 settlers live in Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem.

Characteristics of an unauthorized outpost:¹

- There was no government decision to establish it.
- The outpost was established with no legal planning status.
- An unauthorized outpost is not attached to an existing settlement, but rather at least a few hundred meters distant from it as the crow flies.

There are approximately 100 outposts located in the disputed territories. Outposts usually consist of 10-20 trailer homes, and may or may not have water and electricity.

Sinai and Gaza Settlements

There were 6,000 settlers living in the Sinai Peninsula for 22 years after the 6-Day War when Israel returned it to Egypt in 1979. The 15 settlements were evacuated, and the settlement of Yamit required soldiers to forcefully remove some of the residents. Some of the residents removed from the Sinai settled in the Gaza Strip.

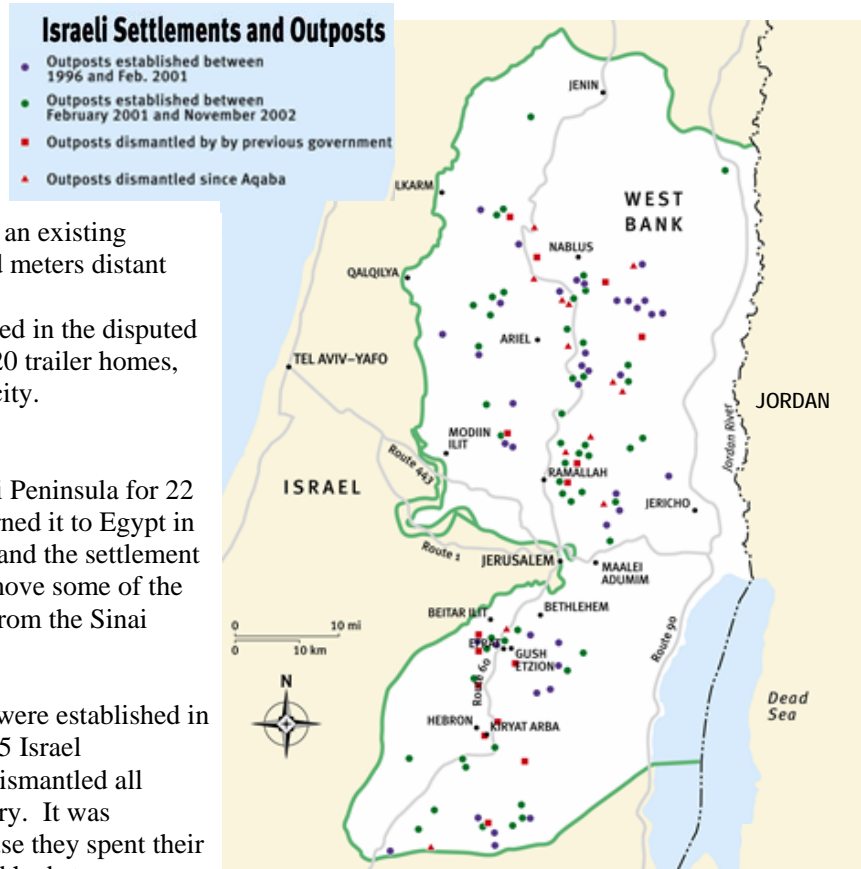
Twenty-one settlements with 7000 settlers were established in the Gaza Strip after the 6-Day War. In 2005 Israel implemented its Disengagement Plan and dismantled all settlements in Gaza and withdrew its military. It was traumatic for many residents to leave because they spent their lives building and developing their land and had strong nationalistic beliefs. The disengagement divided the country politically. Some settlements, such as Gush Katif had to be forcefully evacuated.

West Bank Settlements

The first West Bank settlers (after the 6-Day War) came at the encouragement of the Israeli government to help create a defensive buffer zone. Others returned to rebuild prior settlements, went for religious reasons, and/or for a better quality of life. Currently there are 120 recognized settlements located in the West Bank and close to 280,000 residents among them. Settlement blocs such as Gush Etzion (pop. 60,000), Ma'ale Adummim (33,821), Modi'in Ilit (41,869), Ariel (16,716), and Giv'at Ze'ev (11,603) are the five largest settlements that are close to the Green Line. At the 2000 Camp David Peace Summit, President Clinton's parameters included 94-96% of the West Bank for a Palestinian state, with the addition of a 1-3% swap of areas in Israel, yielding a net 97% for the Palestinians. Eighty percent of the West Bank settlers, most of whom live near the 1967 borders would remain in the West Bank close to the Green Line. This was rejected by the Palestinians. Natural growth of the settlement population poses continuing challenges in regards to settlement policy.

Israeli Public Opinion

A survey of the Israeli general public and Israeli settlers taken in March, 2010 shows 60% of the Israeli public support "dismantling most of the settlements in the territories as part of a peace agreement with the Palestinians." 23% of settlers support such an evacuation of settlements. The survey was conducted by the [Harry S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace, at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem](http://www.hsi.org/).



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¹ <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Law/Legal+Issues+and+Rulings/Summary+of+Opinion+Concerning+Unauthorized+Outposts++Talya+Sason+Adv.htm>



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#12 Millstone Campus Drive, St. Louis, MO 63146-5776 E-mail jrcrstl@jrcrstl.org 314-442-3871 www.jrcrstl.org

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