

Another Israeli West Bank Land Grab Scheme

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In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

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Since 1967, Israel has systematically and relentlessly sought control of the entire “Holy Land” by seizing Gaza, the West Bank and all of Jerusalem. The entire area remains occupied and, according to Israeli professor and activist Jeff Halper, the aggressive “Nishul” agenda continues. It entraps and commits genocide against 1.5 million Gazans under siege in the world’s largest open-air prison. It also displaces Israeli Arabs inside Israel and West Bank Palestinians for expanding Jewish settlements.

It depoliticizes the process to normalize it. Casts it as part of the “war on terrorism” and “class of civilizations.” What Edward Said called the colonized and the colonizers. “The familiar (Europe, West, us, and of course Israel) and the strange (the Orient, East, them).” Halper refers to “adherents to ‘evil’ religions, ideologies or cultures.” Needing to be dealt with. Not people with real grievances, needs and rights. Israel’s solution: “warehousing a surplus (unwanted) population” in prisons, open-air ones, and by isolating and oppressing it relentlessly until all fight is beaten out of it. Others give up and leave.

Banishing Palestinians to around 15% of historic Palestine. Its least valuable parts. Denying them free movement. Keeping them out of Israel and Israeli-controlled West Bank areas. Preventing them from having real state autonomy or developing a viable economy. Relegating them to “surplus humanity” serfdom. Pioneering a “Matrix of Control” model to be used globally. Against billions of “surplus” people everywhere. Making every country look like Israel. Even the US where parts of this writer’s Chicago already look like it. One area close enough to walk to, and controlled by what one observer calls the “police repression capital of America,” referring to the city’s “finest.”

Halper worries why most countries, including Arab ones, grant Israel miles of latitude. Refuse to demand an end to its outrageous practices. It’s to let it provide a “valued service.” Develop a population control model to be exported everywhere. Assuring unwanted people have no political engagement, peace, chance for redress, or any rights. Making them “disappear” into black hole isolation.

Having one overwhelming obstacle in the way. Six decades of Palestinian resistance. Gaining millions of grassroots supporters worldwide. Hoping to prove determination and persistence will overcome repression, and sometimes it does.

Nonetheless, Israeli policies continue. All the while monitored by The Israeli Human Rights organization, B’Tselem. It just documented more evidence in its report titled “Access Denied: Israeli measures to deny Palestinians access to land around (West Bank) settlements.” Its findings are discussed below. It details how authorities block Palestinians’ access to areas adjacent to settlements through closure policies and de facto seizure. Land theft and displacement for greater settlement expansions.

Grave human rights violations, according to B'Tselem. Violations of international humanitarian law as well that apply during war and occupation. The prohibition of an occupying power from transferring people from their own territory to another. The Fourth Geneva Convention's Article 49 states:

"Individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, are prohibited, regardless of the motive."

In addition, the Hague Regulations prohibit occupying powers from permanently changing occupied areas, except for narrowly defined military purposes or to benefit the local population. Settlements by their nature are illegal. Expanding them compounds the crime. Israel does it through complex legal and bureaucratic measures. First by declaring "state land" based on an obscure 1858 Ottoman Lands Law. Also by creating "closed military zones" and "special security areas (SSAs)" for stated Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) needs.

Declaring areas "abandoned assets" as well. Seizing them for public needs, and helping Jewish citizens buy land on the open market. Stolen land they have no right to have. By displacing indigenous Palestinians for expanding Jewish-only settlements. Sanctioned and approved by Israel's High Court of Justice. Complicit in the land grab theft.

Mocking the rule of law. Establishing an official apartheid policy. Legalized separation and discrimination. Repugnant in all respects. Enforcing it through military occupation. Denying Palestinians all rights, including to their land. Having two sets of laws. One for Jews. The other for Arabs. Calling itself a democracy. Violating that standard by any measure.

Operating 23 local Jewish authorities in the West Bank: three municipalities; 14 local councils and six regional ones for 121 Jewish-only settlements and 106 outposts on stolen Palestinian land. For around 500,000 Jews in total, including in 12 East Jerusalem settlements. Providing incentives for Israeli Jews to move to the West Bank. Low-cost housing. Financial grants, and other inducements. Special ones for teachers, other needed professions and companies.

Defining most West Bank settlements as "national priority areas." Either A or B class. Having a planning system that favors Jews and severely restricts Palestinians. Refusing them construction permits on lands earmarked for Jews only. On their own land as well. Employing a home demolition policy. Roads for Jews only, oppressive harassment, and much more. To make life so intolerable, most Palestinians will leave.

Learning nothing from six decades that its scheme won't work. As Edward Said explained before his death. "There is no way for Israel to get rid of Palestinians." They "shar(e) the land that has thrust (them) together (and must do it) in a truly democratic way, with equal rights for each citizen," Jew and Arab.

Israel nonetheless, pursues a ruthless repressive policy. Advantaging its settlers and encouraging or forcing Palestinians to leave. Systematically seizing more land so they will. Leaving them only the least desirable areas. Isolated, occupied and surrounded by hostile Israelis. Denying them the right to their own land, housing, their livelihood, human rights and almost daily for some their lives. Getting away with it because no outside authority stops them or even complains. Seeing things worsen. Making it look legal through radical interpretations of law.

Israel wants the entire region to resemble Occupied Palestine. Israeli journalist and Foreign Ministry-connected Oded Yinon's 1980s vision to make the Jewish state an imperial power. Essential he believed to survive. Doing it by dividing the Middle East into small states. Dissolving existing ones. Making the Arab world one of Arab fragments. Occupied Palestine as well. Making it and regional mini-states Israeli satellites. Seizing more land for greater dominance. Displacing indigenous Arabs to achieve it. Calling Jordan a Palestinian state and forcing Palestinians to resettle there. Ariel Sharon favored the idea. Very likely other Israeli extremists today so anything is possible going forward.

Which brings things to the present and B'Tselem's latest report.

Denying Palestinians Access to Their Own Land

B'Tselem documents how Israel does it. Blocking Palestinians' access to areas adjacent to settlements in two ways:

- with security forces and settler violence and harassment; expelling Palestinians close to settlements and preventing others from approaching; and
- building a secondary security fence around settlements far removed from settler homes; in addition to a close-in barrier already in place as another land grab method; much like the Separation Barrier that the World Court ruled illegal and must come down; Israel disdains international law and refuses.

Further, West Bank Palestinians are prohibited or restricted from entering settlements. Military "special security areas (SSAs)." Roads for Jews only. Military areas of any kind. Annexed land in and around East Jerusalem, and other large areas like the Jordan Valley. B'Tselem reports on one part among many other prohibitions, restrictions, and other harassing measures to seize Palestinian land, including valuable farmland that many families rely on for their livelihood. The practice has been ongoing for decades. Tens of thousands of dunams of land (four dunams to the acre) are affected. New areas continuously added. Once belonging to Palestinians. Now seized under an illegal occupation.

Done in the name of security by lawlessly manipulating a threat to justify a land grab policy. Creating an "absurd situation," according to B'Tselem. Forcing Palestinians to deal with a bureaucratic authority to reach their own property. Enduring great hardships and often being refused. Allowing settlers, in contrast, easy access to Palestinian-owned land to do as they wish. Their presence violates the logic of a "warning area," besides encroaching on property not their own.

Palestinians are obstructed in various ways:

- closing a ring of land around settlements by military orders;
- allowing settlers to harass and expel them from land outside the ring;
- some of it farmland Palestinians have a permit to be on; but, why should they need one at all; it's their land;
- denying them anyway by classifying their property as SSAs;
- requiring Palestinians to obtain bureaucratic permission to enter non-SSA areas; and

— erecting physical barriers around some of them to keep them out.

In all, a convoluted bureaucratic nightmare to deny Palestinians access to their land and seize it for settlement expansions. For years, B'Tselem documented how Israel's "actions relating to land in the Occupied Territories have been carried out in bad faith."

As in America, justifying policy on national security grounds. To protect settlers from those "bad" Palestinians with their small arms and rocks against the world's fourth most powerful (nuclear-armed) military and never reluctant to unleash it.

All Occupied Palestine belongs to its people. Israel has no right to expropriate or occupy it. Its West Bank "settlement enterprise breaches international humanitarian law and is the basis for most human rights violations there. Israel is obligated to evacuate the settlers and resettle them in Israel." Instead displacement and land seizures continue, and B'Tselem's report documents it through dozens of testimonies, interviews, and investigations. Information from state authorities. Background discussions with defense officials, and from a computerized analysis of the closed land borders - as land appears on maps attached to military orders and from aerial photos.

B'Tselem provides a history of Israel's land closure policy. Its harmful aspects and components. The use of physical obstructions to block access. Settlers along with security forces for enforcement. Making land closure around settlements official state policy. Giving Jews unrestricted access and free movement, and creating a bureaucratic and security nightmare for Palestinians. Breaking international law and getting away with it.

Israel now controls over 40% of the West Bank for settlements, its Separation Wall, nature reserves, where its military is based or trains, and the percentage is growing. Its settlements are connected to Israel and each other by a network of for-Jews only roads. Ones for Palestinians are obstructed by hundreds of physical barriers and checkpoints. Palestinian communities are isolated, surrounded and shrinking.

B'Tselem calls "the cumulative effect of the prohibitions and restrictions....grave." Restrictions on free movement. State-sanctioned land seizures. A policy of isolation and separation. The daily threat of settler or security force violence. The impossibility of expanding Palestinian communities. Building homes on their own land. Having industrial development and a normal agriculture. Living in peace and co-existing with their Jewish neighbors. Being free in their own unoccupied land. Getting world support for their rights. Instead losing more of them and their land that's already inadequate for their growing population.

Compelling On-the-Ground Testimonies

In July 2008, Israel expelled Fahmeyeh Fakheideh from her farmland for settlement construction. After her husband died, she had 12 dunams (around three acres) of land and some olive trees. About six years ago, Israelis built a new settlement nearby. A new bypass road as well. Six dunams of her land were enclosed by a new fence and the rest remained outside. The land is her primary income source, and she "didn't know what to do (because she) was afraid of the settlers (and) didn't try to go to (her) land inside the settlement."

Nonetheless, she was harassed on the outside land. Chased away. Had her ladders burned and olives destroyed. Another time confronted with rifles and forced to flee. "Every time we see a settler, we hide." Also "security people....every time they approach us (and treat us)

as if we are robbers on our land. We live in fear....Our greater fear is that the settlers will harm the children.”

In the past three years, she’s had to take great care entering her land. To plow in planting season. Harvest in the fall. Arrive in early morning. Unable to enter until after police and the army show up and settlers open the gate to their settlement. At times, it’s not until 9:00 or 10:00AM. Then soldiers escort them from in front and behind and stay with them until 4:00PM when they’re removed. They’re frightening and force them to work and take meal and bathroom breaks hurriedly. They live constantly under the threat of settler and even military attack.

As a result, they’re denied free access to their land. Restricted from half of it. Production has fallen to less than half of its pre-settlement volume. And in poor harvest years even less.

The family “used to love the harvest season. (They) would stay until evening and not want to go home. (They) would drink tea and coffee and eat and listen to music in (their) orchard and be happy....even cook there and prepare maklubeh, which really tasted good because (they) cooked it on the open fire. Now (they) don’t dare talk while (they’re) in the orchard, because (they) are afraid the settlers will hear (them).” Even the children must be quiet.

When Fahmeyeh goes on the roof of her house and looks at her land and olive trees, she feels “as if (she) were going to die from the sadness. The olive trees are dear to (her), but there is nothing (she) can do to improve the situation.” She struggles to cover her household expenses. Can only gets by because her children are grown, have jobs, and help her. It never used to be this way before the settlement.

Saleh Daraghmeh’s story is also very disturbing. He’s a shepherd in the Jordan Valley. When grazing his flock in the Ein al-Beida area, Shademot Mehola settlers chased him away. Assaulted his 11-year old son. Put a knife to his throat and terrified him.

On September 24, 2007, he was grazing his flock with his sister’s sons and their cows. He saw a car heading toward the nearby settlement. It stopped and two men approached. They ran toward the cows and stoned them. His nephew went over and asked why. The settlers chased him and fired shots at his legs. Saleh came over to calm the situation. Spoke to the intruders in Hebrew and asked why they opened fire. Instead of answering, a settler shot his nephew. Hurt him badly. Saleh tried to give him first aid. Had his other nephew run for help. Get an ambulance. In a Hummer jeep and then an ambulance managed to get him to Rambam Hospital in Haifa. No simple task but he did it.

Police and soldiers came to the scene to investigate. Saleh was summoned to the Efraim police station to give testimony. He saw who shot his nephew. Didn’t remember well enough what he looked like but knew the other settler’s name who was with him. He was only about 14 or 15 years old. Most likely the shooter was also about the same age. Like in most other instances, nothing was expected to result from a very inadequate investigate. Little more than whitewash nearly always. Even when an innocent Palestinian is shot.

B’Tselem collected similar stories to the two above. Palestinians accosted and assaulted in their fields. Their groves. Near or in their homes because they’re close to settlements. Communities as well that are far removed. They’re intimidated. Attacked. Shot at. Their property is destroyed, and authorities do little to stop it. B’Tselem states firmly that they can do plenty and should:

- order the army, police and Civil Administration to rigidly enforce the law; ensure settlers obey it; prosecute those who don't; provide equal justice to Jews and Arabs equally;
- have security forces dismantle fences and other physical barriers that have no business being there;
- fulfill their obligations as an occupying power by providing security for the occupied people to keep them safe from settler violence;
- have IDF commanders order their subordinates to assure Palestinians rights are observed and enforced;
- prosecute soldiers who violate the orders;
- “cancel the engineering components of the SSA plan and remove secondary fences;” and
- ensure Palestinians have free access to their land; no need for advance coordination, and no concerns about facing settler or security force violence.

B'Tselem goes further as well and calls on “the government of Israel (to) evacuate all the settlements and return the settlers to Israeli territory” in accordance with international humanitarian law. Instead, Israel continues its expansion projects. Oppresses and displaces indigenous Palestinians. Seizes all parts of Occupied Palestine it wants for itself, and mocks the rule of law by disobeying it. B'Tselem and all people of conscience are outraged. An Israeli government spokesperson wasn't available for comment.

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