

## Israel Defense Ministry secretly setting aside additional land for Jewish settlement expansion

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Newly released maps indicate Civil Administration secretly setting aside additional land for Jewish settlements, presumably with the intention of expanding them.

The Civil Administration, part of the Defense Ministry, released its maps only in response to a request from anti-settlement activist Dror Etkes under the Freedom of Information Law.

In some places the boundaries of the parcels outlined in the maps coincide with the route of the West Bank separation barrier.

The state has argued before the Supreme Court and the International Court of Justice in The Hague that the route of the separation barrier was based on Israel's security needs. But Civil Administration's maps and figures, disclosed here for the first time, suggest the barrier route was planned in accordance with the available land in the West Bank, intended to increase the area and population of the settlements.

A total of 569 parcels of land were marked out, encompassing around 620,000 dunams (around 155,000 acres) – about 10 percent of the total area of the West Bank. Since the late 1990s, 23 of the unauthorized outposts were built on land included in the map. The Civil Administration is endeavoring to legalize some of these outposts, including Shvut Rahel, Rehelim and Hayovel.

Etkes believes this indicates the settlers who built the outposts had access to the administration's research on available land – more proof of the government's deep involvement in the systematic violation of the law in order to expand settlements, he says.

The maps name numerous communities that do not exist. These include Shlomzion, on land belonging to the Palestinian town of Aqraba, east of Nablus; Lev Hashomron, on the land of Kafr Haja, between Nablus and Qalqilyah; Mevo Adumim, on the lands of al-Azariya and Abu Dis; and Mitzpeh Zanoah and Mitzpeh Lahav, in south Mount Hebron.

The names of several sites suggest they are earmarked for the expansion of existing settlements, although some of the parcels are several kilometers distant from their namesakes. These include Immanuel Mizrah, Elkana Bet, Beit Aryeh Gimmel and Tekoa Sheet'hei Mir'ey, among others.

The maps also mark 81 sites on 114,000 dunams in areas A and B, which are under Palestinian civil control, indicating the Civil Administration began identifying available land before the Oslo Accords. But these parcels have not been updated in several years because

Israel cannot build settlements on them.

All the other areas – 506,000 dunams in Area C, have been updated in the past decade. This implies the administration earmarked the sites as reserves for future use, says Etkes.

More than 90 percent of this land is east of the separation barrier, beyond the main settlement blocs.

“This means the administration currently updates the ‘land bank,’ flouting the peace process, which is based on the two-state principle,” Etkes said.

Most of the marked areas – 485,000 dunams in area C – are classified as state lands. About 7,600 dunams are classified as “Jewish land” from before 1948, and 12,800 dunams are unclassified. Presumably the administration sees them as state lands, says Etkes.

Under international pressure Israel has drastically reduced new claims of land for the state. In a letter to Nir Shalev of Bimkom – Planners for Planning Rights, the Civil Administration said that in 2003-09 a total of 5,000 dunams were declared state lands, as opposed to hundreds of thousands of dunams in previous decades.

Some 375,000 dunams in Area C are not included in the jurisdiction of the settlements, which take up some 9.5 percent of the West Bank.

A 2007 Peace Now report indicated that only nine percent of the land in the settlements’ jurisdiction were in use. The administration’s map reveals the existence of another land reserve. Although only a small part has been officially allocated to the settlements, it is being constantly updated by the administration.

The Civil Administration said in a response that the maps are a data bank that is updated from time to time and does not indicate plans to expand settlements, which is a complex procedure requiring discussions and permits.

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