

“This Land is Ours,” Says Israel’s Top Diplomat, Citing Religious Texts to Justify Jewish Settlements in the West Bank

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Tzipi Hotevely [\(Wikimedia Commons\)](#)

Tzipi Hotevely, Israel’s new deputy foreign minister, vowed to continue building Jewish-only [settlements](#) across the occupied [West Bank](#), including [East Jerusalem](#), in a recent speech to ministry employees.

Hotevely is a member of Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#)’s hardline [Likud](#) party which returned to power in Israel’s 17 March elections at the head of one of the most right-wing coalition governments in the country’s history.

Because Netanyahu is presently serving as acting foreign minister, Hotevely is the highest ranking diplomat for the time being, [Associated Press reports](#). “This land is ours,” she said. “All of it is ours. We did not come here to apologize for that.”

Announcing that she intends to seek international recognition of Israeli settlements, she said: “We expect as a matter of principle of the international community to recognize Israel’s right to build homes for Jews in their homeland, everywhere.”

Considered illegal under international law, more than half a million Israeli settlers live in colonies across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

“We sought to present arguments that would play well diplomatically, but currently it’s important to be right. We need to get back to the basic truth of our right to this land,” Hotevely also said, according to Israeli daily [Haaretz](#).

Annexation

Hotevely cited a number of religious texts to justify her claims to Palestinian land. “Rashi says the Torah opens with the story of the creation of the world so that if the nations of the world come and tell you that you are occupiers, you must respond that all of the land belonged to the creator of the world and when he wanted to, he took from them and gave to us,” she said, citing medieval scholar Rabbi Shlomo Ben Yitzhaki by his abbreviated name.

Hotevely’s statements are nothing new, and she has in the past been outspoken about her expansionist designs. In 2013, while serving as deputy transportation minister, she [accused her colleagues](#) in the Likud party of exhibiting what she called “schizophrenia.”

Denouncing negotiations towards a [two-state solution](#) between Israel and the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority, she reasserted her support for annexation. “Members of our movement [Likud] never agreed to found a Palestinian state.”

“The existence of Jordan is a historic compromise,” she added, recycling a frequent Zionist talking point that Jordan should serve as a national homeland for Palestinians. “Whoever believes in the Greater Land of Israel has never been prepared to give parts of our homeland away for any purpose, not even for peace.”

“I’m a Jewish racist”

Objecting to Hotovely’s plan to annex the whole West Bank and to force Palestinians to accept Israeli citizenship, her fellow Likud member Eli Hazan said: “I’m a Jewish racist, and I’m not embarrassed to say I want a Jewish state with a Jewish majority.”

Hazan’s comments reflect a common argument among many liberal and, to a lesser extent, right-wing Zionists who cite Palestinian birthrates as a “ticking time bomb” or “[demographic threat](#)” that could undo Israel’s Jewish majority.

Yet, in response, Hotovely said she is “unafraid of Israel becoming a binational state, rather than a Jewish state, as the government would also declare Jewish immigration as a national goal,” as the right-wing Israeli daily the [Jerusalem Post reported at the time](#).

In order to offset the demographic balance, Hotovely proposed a government plan to bring a million Jews from across the world to Israel, the [Jerusalem Post](#) added.

Following the [kidnapping and killing of three Israeli youths](#) hitchhiking in the occupied West Bank last summer, Hotovely likened Palestinians to “Nazis” and [called for the death penalty](#) against Palestinians convicted of armed activities against Israel.

In 2013, when Palestinian member of the Israel’s parliament [Jamal Zahalka](#) spoke out against plans to recruit Palestinian citizens of Israel into civic service, Hotovely [lashed out at him](#) for supposedly encouraging them “to be freeloaders, to take as much as they can without giving anything to the country.”

Not alone

Regarding her expansionist designs and anti-Palestinian views, Hotovely is not alone in the new Israeli government.

On “[Jerusalem Day](#),” an Israeli holiday celebrating the 1967 military occupation of East Jerusalem, Netanyahu promised to “continue to build and nurture [Jerusalem], to expand her neighborhoods,” referring to the city as the “eternal capital” of Jews alone.

“I have a clear position — we build in Jerusalem,” Netanyahu said.

Netanyahu also appointed the Jewish Home ([Habayit Hayehudi](#)) party’s [Ayelet Shaked](#) as justice minister. Shaked – internationally notorious for a [Facebook post last summer](#) endorsing genocide of Palestinians – and her party [support unilaterally annexing Area C](#) of the West Bank. Compromising some 60 percent of the territory, Area C is under full Israeli military control and is home to more than 300,000 Palestinians, [according](#) to a

2014 [United Nations](#) estimate.

[Uri Ariel](#), the new agricultural minister, also has a long history of promoting the unilateral annexation of the West Bank. A prominent figure among Israeli settlers, Ariel as far back as 2012 urged Israel to annex the West Bank and give Palestinians the “status of residents,” *+972 Magazine* [noted at the time](#).

From 2013 till 2015, Ariel served as Israel’s construction minister and oversaw the expansion of settlements in East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank.

Netanyahu also put [Silvan Shalom](#), a Likud politician who supports settlements, in charge of negotiations with the Palestinian Authority, *Haaretz* recently [reported](#). While touring the occupied West Bank in 2014, Shalom referred to Jewish-only settlements as “the bullet proof vest of the State of Israel.” In effect, Shalom seems to be saying that Israel views settlers as human shields.

Earlier this month, Israeli settler leaders expressed optimism over the composition of Israel’s new government. “There is a pretty permanent reality in Judea and Samaria, one that is almost irreversible,” Yigal Dilmoni, the spokesman for the settler group the Yesha Council, [told the Associated Press](#), referring to the West Bank using Israel’s terminology. “We are optimistic but not power drunk.”

Plans implemented

Plans to continue the colonization of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are already being implemented at a breakneck pace under the new government.

Netanyahu [approved the construction](#) of 900 new settler homes in [Ramat Shlomo](#), a colony in East Jerusalem, earlier this month.

Israel also ordered the demolition of Abu Nuwwar, a [Bedouin](#) village in the occupied West Bank, to make way for the expansion of the [Maaleh Adumim](#) settlement, [according to Ma’an News Agency](#). That plan will cause dozens of Palestinian families to be forcibly relocated to a nearby planned township.

As part of Netanyahu’s coalition agreement with the ultra-nationalist Jewish Home party, his government will [seek to retroactively recognize](#) Israeli [“outposts”](#) – West Bank settlements built without the government’s permission.

In addition to the more than 150 settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, around 100 outposts are scattered throughout the territory.

Despite the new government’s clear intentions to expand existing settlements and build new ones, the United States has warmly welcomed the new coalition.

President [Barack Obama](#) sent “congratulations” to Israel’s new government, according to a White House statement published in early May. “President Obama looks forward to working with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his new government,” the statement read.

The Obama administration also [approved a deal to provide Israel with \\$1.9 billion in weapons](#) as “compensation” for the US-[Iran](#) nuclear deal.

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