

Israel Takes Over Massive Tract Of Palestinian Land



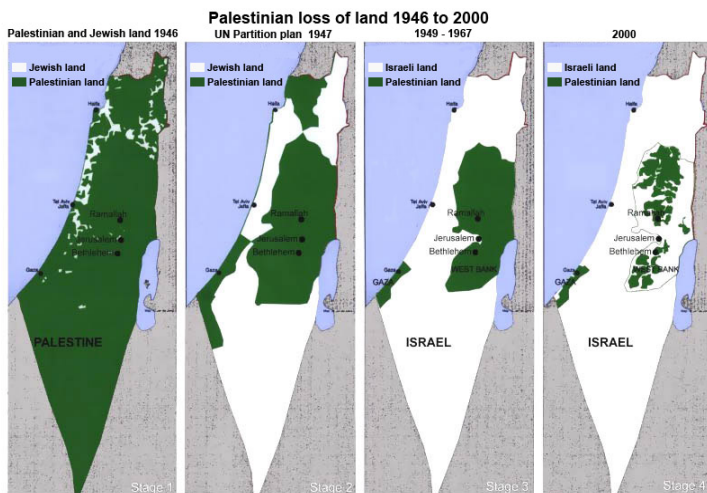
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Israel Confirms They Are Stealing More Land From Palestinians In The West Bank

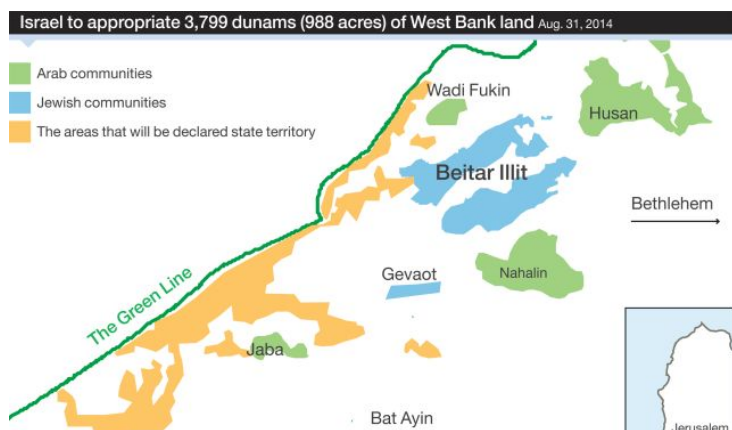


Takeover from five Palestinian villages is biggest West Bank land appropriation in 30 years, says Peace Now; settlers laud Netanyahu, Ya'alon, government.



By Chaim Levinson and Jack Khoury

Israel's Civil Administration in the West Bank yesterday announced the takeover of 988 acres (3,799 dunams) belonging to five Palestinian villages between the Etzion settlement bloc and Jerusalem. The move clears the way for construction of a new settlement named Gvaot. The announcement follows the cabinet's decision last week to take over the land in response to the June kidnapping and killing of three teenage Jewish boys by Hamas militants in the area.



Israel to appropriate 988 acres of West Bank land, Aug. 31, 2014. / Photo by Haaretz

Peace Now, which monitors settlement construction, said it was the largest Israeli appropriation of West Bank land in 30 years.

David Perl, head of the Gush Etzion local council, said the "declaration of some 4,000 dunams as state land paves the way for the establishment of Gvaot, a new city in Gush Etzion. I want to congratulate the prime minister and the government of Israel on their promotion of the initiative, and the defense minister and head of the civil administration on getting the decision approved."

The appropriated land belongs to five Palestinian villages in the Bethlehem area: Jaba, Surif, Wadi Fukin, Husan and Nahalin.

The move is the latest of a series of plans designed to attach the Etzion settlement bloc to Jerusalem and its environs. Construction of a major settlement, known as Gvaot, at the location has been mooted by Israel since the year 2000. Last year, the government invited bids for the building of 1,000 housing units at the site, and 523 are currently under construction. Ten families now live on the site, which is adjacent to a yeshiva.

Justice Minister Tzipi Livni told IDF Radio last night that the timing of the announcement was inappropriate. "Israel now needs to be recruiting the world to prevent steps being taken against it, and to work together with those moderate forces" she said. "Anything that can turn attention toward us and arouse criticism against us hurts the very things we are trying to achieve."

Palestinian officials did not seem very surprised last night by the Israeli cabinet decision. Immediately after last week's cease-fire, Haaretz reported that senior officials in the Palestinian Authority were turning to the United Nations and the European Union warning that Israel was taking steps whose goal was to strengthen its hold on territories beyond the Green Line.

"It's been proven that this government has no intention of moving forward with the peace process," one senior PA official told Haaretz.

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman for Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, called on Israel yesterday to cancel the takeover. "This decision will lead to more instability. This will only inflame the situation after the war in Gaza," Abu Rudeineh said.

Israel maintains that construction at Gvaot would not constitute a new settlement because the area is officially designated a neighborhood of a long-standing settlement, Alon Shvut. However, the area of Gvaot lies several miles away from Alon Shvut.