

ISRAELI DEFENSE MINISTER: ISRAEL WILL TAKE 20% OF REMAINING PALESTINIAN LAND



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"When we talk about Israel's permanent or future borders it includes the Jordan Valley, Maale Adumim, Gush Etzion, Ariel, Kedumim-Karnei Shomron and Rehan-Shaked", said Israeli Prime Minister Shaul Mofaz in a speech this week in Jerusalem.

The areas he mentioned comprise 20% of the West Bank, home to 3.5 million Palestinians, many of them refugees in what is now Israel.

Settlements have expanded exponentially in the West Bank since 1993, when the 'Camp David' accord was supposed to bring peace to the region. 250,000 Israeli settlers now live illegally (according to international law) in settlements in the West Bank, an area occupied by the Israeli military since 1967. Those West Bank settlements are what Mofaz was referring to in his speech, defining what 'Israel' will look like when 'final borders' are decided upon.

With Israeli forces going ahead with Annexation Wall construction in an accelerated mode since the Palestinian elections January 25th, the Wall is now surrounding many parts of Palestinian land. Instead of being built upon the 'green line' armistice border of 1967 between Israel and the West Bank, the Wall snakes through Palestinian land, protecting 'settler-only' roads and highways, cutting apart Palestinian communities, and completely surrounding some towns and cities, like Qalqilia in the northern West Bank.

Despite paying lip-service to the US-backed 'roadmap to peace', and demanding that Palestinian parties adhere to the terms of the 'roadmap', Israel itself is in violation of most of the terms it agreed to when the roadmap was established, settlement expansion being a key violation. Even while so-called 'disengagement' of settlers was taking place in the Gaza Strip in 2005, the number of settlers in the West Bank was steadily increasing -- so much so that in 2005, the year of 'disengagement', there was a net increase in the total number of Israeli settlers living illegally on Palestinian land.

Mofaz' statement collaborates statements made several weeks ago by acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who said that Israel would 'take the Jordan Valley'. Their party, the Kadima Party, is expected to win in Israel's March 27th elections, after which it is predicted that they will engage in some highly-publicized 'pull-outs' from some small, isolated West Bank outposts, while firming their hold on the areas detailed by Mofaz.

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