

Israeli Perspectives on Judea and Samaria

Ibolya Lubiczki

September 2024

Israeli Perspectives on Judea and Samaria

Ibolya Lubiczki

Abstract

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict remains one of the most enduring and complex geopolitical disputes of modern times. Central to this conflict is the territorial status of Judea and Samaria (West Bank), a region of deep historical, religious, and political significance to both sides. Since Israel took control over Judea and Samaria in 1967, various proposals have been put forward to divide, annex, or grant autonomy over parts of this contested land. These proposals have been shaped by political, security, demographic, and ideological factors and have elicited varying degrees of support and opposition both locally and internationally.

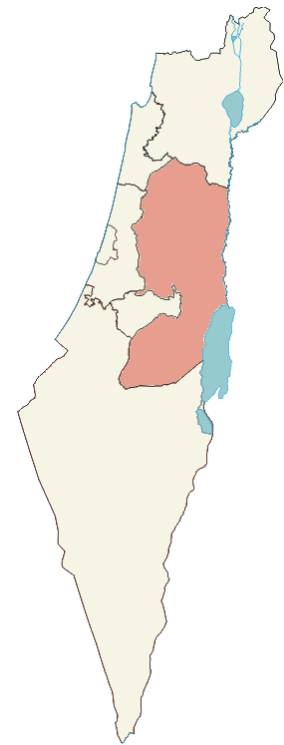
This paper explores the evolution of Israeli proposals regarding the future of Judea and Samaria, analysing key plans such as the Allon Plan, the Olmert Plan, and other Israeli scholars' and politicians' proposals. By examining the rationale, goals, and implications of these plans, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Israel's strategic interests in the region and the broader impact these proposals have had on the prospects for peace.

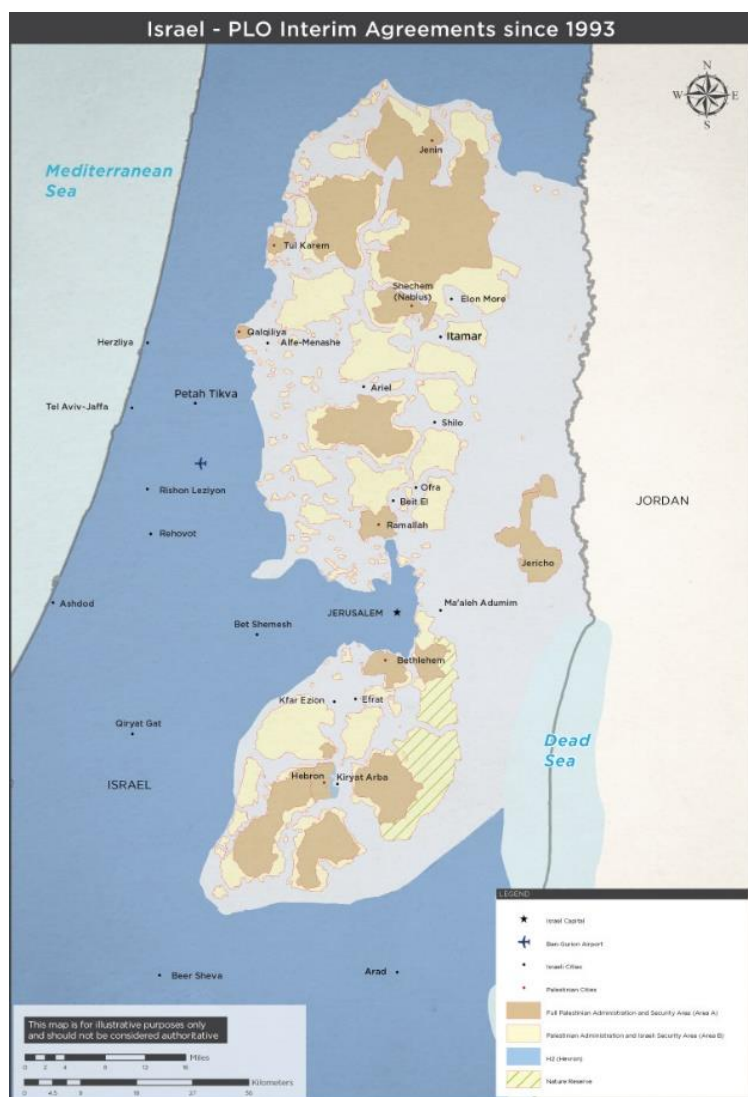
General Overview

Judea and Samaria is a geographical region in Israel that is frequently referred to in mainstream media as the "West Bank". This term gained prominence following Jordan's occupation of the territory from 1949 to 1967. The designation "West Bank" was used to differentiate this newly occupied territory from Jordan itself, which is situated on the eastern bank of the Jordan River.

Historically, the term "Judea" has been used to describe the region located south of Jerusalem, while "Samaria" refers to the mountainous area north of the city. The name "Judea" originates from the ancient tradition that the Jewish tribe of Judah inhabited the land south of Jerusalem, whereas the Samaritans, a sect from Biblical times, resided in the northern mountainous region. These terms, "Judea" and "Samaria," appear in the accounts of travelers to the region during the Middle Ages. In more recent history, both the League of Nations and the United Nations consistently referred to the region as Judea and Samaria in official documents until 1949.¹

During the Six-Day War of 1967, Israel gained control over the region, which spanned approximately 5,800 square kilometres. This territory holds substantial importance for Israel due to its historical, geopolitical, and religious significance. The international framework for its governance was established through the Oslo II Accords, also known as the Interim Agreements, signed in 1993 between the Israeli government and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Under this agreement, the region was divided into three distinct administrative areas: A, B, and C.





In Area A, which comprises 17.2% of the territory, full control over both security and civil affairs was granted to the Palestinian Authority. Area B, covering 23.8% of the region, was designated for joint Israeli-Palestinian governance, where the Palestinian Authority assumed responsibility for civilian matters while Israel retained security control. Area C, representing the remaining 59% of Judea and Samaria, remained entirely under Israeli control, with governance arrangements mirroring the opposite of those in Area A.

In Israel’s administrative framework, the region of Judea and Samaria holds considerable significance. It constitutes one of the seven major districts of Israel and is governed by six regional councils and 14 local municipalities. Major urban centres in the region include Ariel, Beitar Illit, Ma’ale

Adumim, and Modi’in Illit. Despite being designated as a district, it is not fully integrated into the broader Israeli legal system, as certain laws that apply to other districts are not uniformly enforced here. For example, parts of the income tax regulations, social security laws, and specific statutes related to Judea and Samaria are applied differently.

In Area C, where approximately 150 Jewish settlements are located, the population in 2022 reached over 490,000 residents, representing 5.2% of Israel’s total population. These residents, who are Israeli citizens, live in a region with a notably young demographic— 53.1% of the population is under the age of 18. The youthful profile of the population has fostered a strong emphasis on higher education, with universities and colleges providing educational opportunities within the region. In terms of religious demographics, the population consists primarily of Orthodox Jews (36%), followed by religious Zionists (35%), with the remaining 29% identifying as secular ²

Agriculture serves as the dominant industry in Judea and Samaria, alongside the operation of approximately 900 factories, 70 national parks, and nature reserves. Geographically, the region forms a mountainous area about 15 kilometers from Tel Aviv and Israel's central regions, with an elevation of around 1,100 meters above sea level. It encompasses the Judean Desert, the Samarian Mountains, and the Judean Mountains, contributing to its strategic importance.

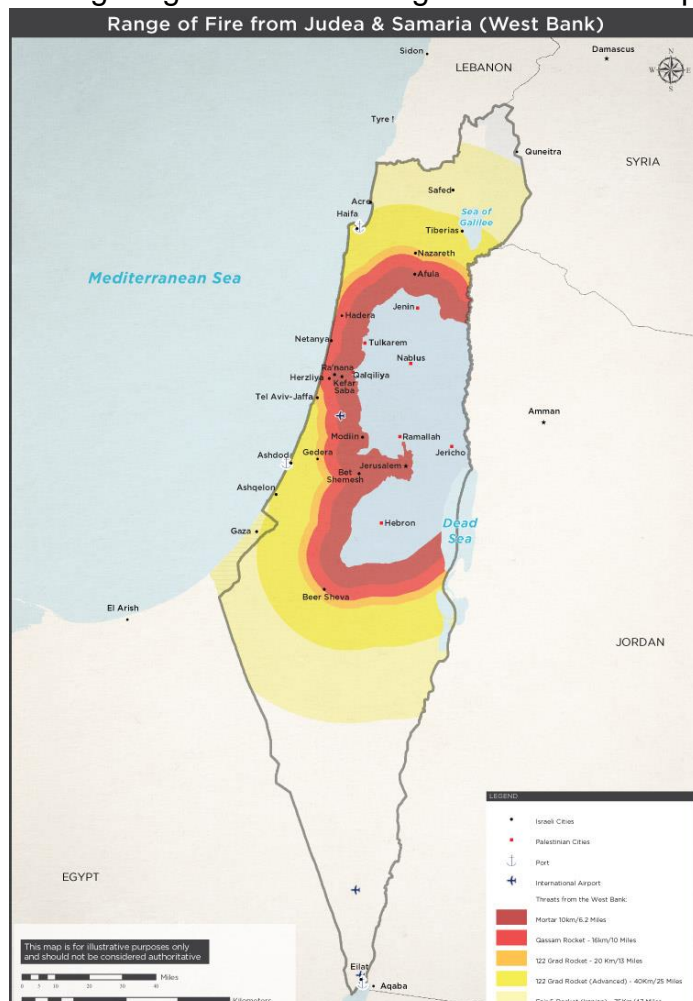
Strategic importance

The settlement of Judea and Samaria is driven by security considerations that extend beyond ideological motivations, significantly influencing the policies of various political parties and governments. The region holds exceptional strategic value from a security standpoint due to its mountainous topography, which ranges from 100 to 1,100 meters above sea level. This elevation offers a commanding position over the surrounding areas, including Israel's eastern border, which lies adjacent to countries such as Jordan and broadly to Iraq and Iran. Control of this terrain is essential for maintaining air defense capabilities, allowing Israel to mitigate potential threats, such as rocket or missile attacks from the east—threats Israel has faced repeatedly throughout its history.

In the words of Brig. Gen. (Res.) Amir Aviv “the one who controls the mountains of Judea and Samaria controls Israel. Both the Mediterranean Sea coast and the Jordan Valley can be seen from the top of the Judean mountains. Israel has no physical existence without the mountains of Judea and Samaria.”³



The fight against terror also gives enormous importance to the region from the Israeli perspective.



Range of Fire from Judea & Samaria (West Bank), Accessed September 24, 2024. <https://embassies.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/Maps/Pages/Range-of-Fire-from-West-Bank.aspx>

Israel's physical presence in Judea and Samaria facilitates the utilization of various intelligence-gathering methods, including the deployment of agents and informants, surveillance operations, wiretapping, and the establishment of observation points throughout the region. Additionally, the Israeli armed forces possess the authority to conduct operations aimed at countering terrorism, which includes the implementation of security checkpoints, the dismantling of bomb-making facilities, and targeted killings. Currently, Israel's presence enables the ongoing operation of surveillance systems along its security fence and at checkpoints, which are crucial for collecting vital intelligence. This intelligence delays potential terrorist activities and provides security services with the necessary time to intercept threats before they can reach their

intended targets.⁴

Furthermore, the region is crucial for Israel's water security, as nearly 50% of the country's natural water resources originate from mountain aquifers in Judea and Samaria. Rainwater collected in these highlands flows into underground reservoirs along the coastal plain. As a result, control over this area also means control over vital water resources, adding to the region's strategic importance.

Israeli perspectives on Judea and Samaria

Throughout history, numerous politicians and scholars have put forward various proposals aimed at resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the Judea and Samaria region. However, the deep-rooted religious significance of the area for Israelis, coupled with prevailing security concerns, has consistently made disengagement from this territory an impractical option.

From a **religious perspective**, the Jewish people assert an inalienable right to the territories of Judea and Samaria based on the Tanakh, or Old Testament, which functions not only as a religious scripture but also as a historical document supported by recent archaeological discoveries. The Tanakh recounts that the Jewish patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and the twelve tribes resided in significant locations such as Shechem, the Oak of Moreh, Bethel, and Hebron. This region is intrinsically linked to the Promised Land. Approximately 80% of subsequent biblical narratives are associated with this area, including cities like Hebron, which have a history spanning 4,000 years. The road, called the “Road of the Patriarchs,” runs from Beer-Sheba through Hebron, Jerusalem, to Shechem. This road appears in the popular “Binding of Isaac” scene when Abraham travels to Jerusalem to sacrifice his son. Following Egyptian captivity, Shiloh emerged as the first spiritual center of Judaism, while Hebron served as the first political center during the reign of King David.

To further explore the political proposals concerning the region, it is essential to begin by acknowledging one of Israel's most prominent statesmen, **Ze'ev Jabotinsky**. The founder of Revisionist Zionism held a significant vision for the future of Israel before the establishment of the country that has influenced Israeli political thought to this day. He envisioned a **Jewish-majority state** spanning **both banks of the Jordan**, primarily for security reasons, asserting that the Arab population would only accept the existence of a Jewish country once they understood that they could not expel the Jews from the land. Jabotinsky argued that if Arabs believed they could displace the Jews, they would continue to resist. Viewing Jews as foreign settlers, Jabotinsky advocated for the protection of the Jewish population through an “iron wall,” symbolizing a strong Jewish military presence, initially supported by the British, to safeguard the Jewish community.⁵

In addition to Jabotinsky's vision, **the concept of Greater Israel** has played an essential role in the history of modern Israel. This idea refers to expanding Israel's borders in alignment with those described in the Old Testament or other historical sources. The specific boundaries have varied, sometimes referencing the biblical Promised Land or the ancient Kingdom of Israel, established through the unification of the 12 Jewish tribes. In contemporary discourse, Greater Israel primarily relates to the territories captured during the Six-Day War, particularly the regions of Judea and Samaria.

Following the Israeli War of Independence and the subsequent Rhodes Agreements in 1949, an armistice line was established, leading to the annexation of territories west

of the Jordan River, including parts of the Jerusalem Hills, the Samarian Mountains, and sections of the Judean Desert and the Dead Sea by the Kingdom of Jordan, which referred to these areas as the West Bank. This annexation was officially recognized only by Britain.

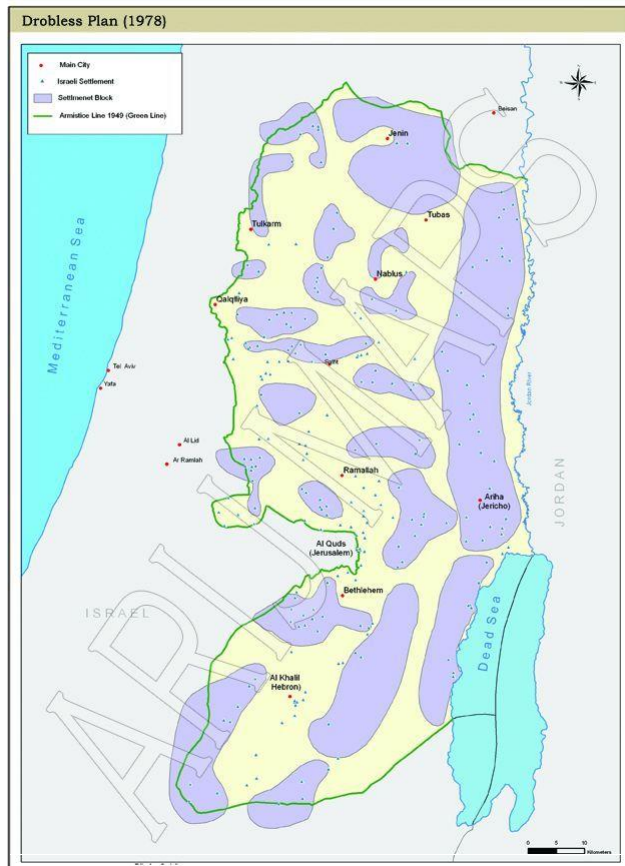
The Six-Day War marked a significant turning point, as Israel captured Judea and Samaria, leading to the concept of Greater Israel becoming a prominent belief among many public figures and intellectuals. While some had advocated for this idea before the conflict, the war's outcome made it appear more feasible, prompting additional support from others. Notably, in the aftermath of the war in 1967, a declaration was issued by a collective of writers and intellectuals identifying themselves as the "Movement for the Liberation of the Land of Israel." Furthermore, even some left-wing factions engaged in promoting this idea through initiatives like the "Movement for Greater Israel."

Following the conclusion of the 1967 Six-Day War, the Allon and Dayan Plans emerged as two of the most prominent strategies for addressing Israel's territorial and security concerns. Although neither plan was officially adopted, mainly due to the broader geopolitical landscape and the complexities of international diplomacy, both played a critical role in shaping subsequent Israeli settlement policies.

Yigal Allon recognized that complete Israeli control over the West Bank was impractical given the substantial Arab population that resided there. Allon proposed concentrating settlement efforts in the relatively sparsely populated Jordan Valley to mitigate the challenges posed by incorporating this population into Israel. This approach aimed to establish a more defensible border with Jordan while limiting the integration of densely populated Palestinian areas.⁶

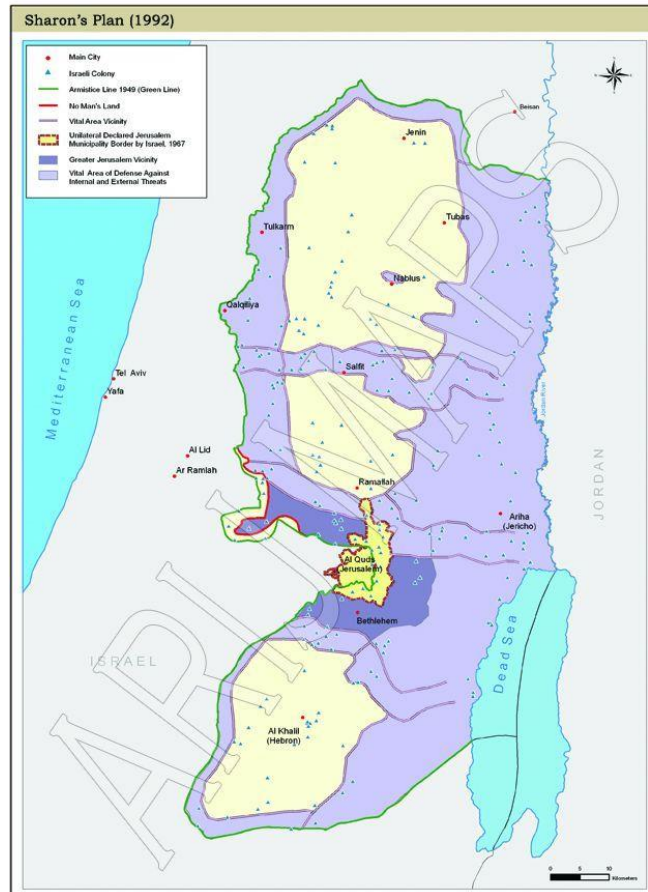


In contrast, **Moshe Dayan** advocated for a different approach. He prioritized the creation of military and Jewish settlements in the more mountainous regions of the West Bank. Dayan's strategy aimed to prevent Arab populations from asserting claims of territorial autonomy by maintaining a physical and military presence in these strategic highlands. While divergent in their methods, both plans underscore the early Israeli efforts to balance territorial security with demographic and political considerations in the aftermath of the 1967 war.⁷



In 1977, **Matityahu Droblless**, head of the World Zionist Organization's Settlement Division, formulated a comprehensive plan to establish 100,000 new settlements throughout the West Bank over four years. A significant portion of these settlements, developed under the Droblless Plan, were strategically located along the central mountain ridge, surrounding key Palestinian population centers. The plan aligned with the ideological goals of the Gush Emunim movement, advocating for expansive Jewish settlement across the region. This approach marked a departure from the earlier Allon Plan.⁸

During his tenure as Minister of Agriculture (1977–1981), and later as Prime Minister, **Ariel Sharon** expanded and modified the Drobles Plan and aligned with the objectives of the Gush Emunim movement. Sharon's strategy emphasized increasing Jewish settlements along the central mountain ridge of the West Bank, further entrenching Israeli control over strategic areas. Under the Sharon Plan, only a limited number of densely populated Palestinian communities would remain outside Israeli sovereignty, reflecting a vision of territorial expansion with minimal Palestinian presence. Sharon's approach pursued stricter policies, including the removal and transfer of Palestinian populations.⁹



Following Ariel Sharon's Disengagement Plan in 2005, which resulted in evacuating four settlements in Judea and Samaria, his successor, **Ehud**

Olmert, introduced a new initiative known as the **Convergence Plan**. This plan proposed a phased evacuation of most settlements in Judea and Samaria, aligning with the Israeli government's broader separation policy. The Convergence Plan aimed to concentrate evacuated settlement residents into three major blocs: Ma'ale Adumim, Ariel, and Gush Etzion. These blocs would be situated along the route of the separation barrier or an alternative route that would garner both national consensus and international



legitimacy. Most of the settlements designated for evacuation were intended to be relocated to these blocs, totalling approximately 60 settlements, thereby allowing Israel to retain about 7% of the territories of Judea and Samaria based on the 1967 borders.

¹⁰

During the Second Lebanon War in the summer of 2006, Olmert expressed optimism that the conflict would provide momentum for advancing the Convergence Plan. However, following the outcomes of the war, he ultimately declared that the plan was no longer viable.

The 7-Point Plan for Managing the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Judea and Samaria, proposed by **Naftali Bennett** in 2012, received significant acclaim from political and military leaders. Central to the plan is the unilateral extension of Israeli sovereignty over Area C, which is crucial for safeguarding vital interests, including the security of Jerusalem and the Gush Dan region, the protection of Israeli communities, and the preservation of sovereignty over key National Heritage Sites.

The territories incorporated into Israeli sovereignty under this plan aim to ensure territorial contiguity, encompassing the Jordan Valley, Dead Sea, Ariel, Ma'ale Adumim, the mountainous regions above Ben Gurion Airport, and all Israeli communities in Judea and Samaria. Furthermore, the plan proposes granting full citizenship to the approximately 50,000 Arabs residing in Area C, while ensuring full autonomy for the Palestinian Authority (PA) in Areas A and B, along with the unrestricted movement of people and goods among all PA-controlled territories.

Additionally, the plan stipulates that Palestinian refugees from Arab countries would not be allowed to settle in Judea and Samaria, establishing a comprehensive Israeli security framework for the entire region. Finally, it emphasizes substantial economic investment to foster coexistence on the ground, thus addressing the area's security and economic development. ¹¹

Recently, one of the most distinctive approaches to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was proposed by **Mordechai Kedar**, a scholar of Arabic culture and lecturer. The idea is known as **the Eight-State Solution or the United Palestinian Emirates**. This plan draws from the historical and socio-political experiences of Arab states, where tribal, ethnic, and religious loyalties often surpass national identity. Kedar argues that the success of countries like the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi

Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman stems from their recognition of this tribal structure, in contrast to the failure of centralized states such as Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Algeria, Sudan, and Libya.

In Kedar's view, since Palestinian society is also tribal, a similar model should be applied. He proposed the establishment of eight independent Palestinian emirates based on the prominent clans of major cities in Judea and Samaria. The proposed emirates would include cities such as Hebron, Jericho, Ramallah, Tulkarem, Qalqilya, Nablus, Jenin, and Gaza. These city-based emirates would operate as autonomous entities, reflecting the tribal affiliations of their populations.

According to the plan, the rural areas surrounding these emirates would become part of Israel, and the villagers in those areas would be offered full Israeli citizenship. Kedar further asserts that Jerusalem would remain the eternal Jewish historical capital, and the Arabs living in the city, who do not belong to the tribal system, could be offered Israeli citizenship.¹²



Conclusion

Israeli proposals to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in Judea and Samaria have evolved over decades, reflecting a wide range of political ideologies, security concerns, and strategic goals. From the early plans of Yigal Allon and Moshe Dayan to the more recent proposals by Ariel Sharon, Ehud Olmert, and Naftali Bennett, each initiative has sought to address the complex realities on the ground, including security, demographics, and territorial control.

These plans vary in their approaches—some advocate for the consolidation of Israeli sovereignty over key areas, while others propose unilateral disengagement or localized autonomy for Palestinians. The strategies have ranged from territorial compromises, such as the Convergence Plan, to more radical solutions like the Eight-State Solution by Mordechai Kedar, which suggests restructuring Palestinian governance based on tribal affiliations. While none of these proposals have resulted in a lasting resolution, they underscore the intricate balance of securing Israel's strategic interests, accommodating Palestinian national aspirations, and navigating regional and international pressures.

Bibliography

- ¹ Anon, (n.d.). Judea & Samaria in a Glimpse - American Friends of Judea and Samaria. Available at: <https://afjs.org/judea-samaria-in-a-glimpse/>. [Accessed 24 Sep. 2024].
- ² Myesha.org.il. (2023). Population Data Report for Judea, Samaria, and the Jordan Valley - as of January, 2023. Available at: <https://myesha.org.il/?CategoryID=411&ArticleID=10312> [Accessed 24 Sep. 2024].
- ³ Student Supporting Israel (SSI) (2020). Strategic Importance of Judea and Samaria. YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tf7gPvPM_B0 [Accessed 24 Sep. 2024].
- ⁴ Myesha.org.il. (2024). Terrorism Before and After Oslo. Available at: <https://myesha.org.il/?CategoryID=508&ArticleID=9812> [Accessed 24 Sep. 2024].
- ⁵ Colonisation of Palestine Agreement with Arabs Impossible at present Zionism Must Go Forward. (n.d.). Available at: <https://en.jabotinsky.org/media/9747/the-iron-wall.pdf>. [Accessed 24 Sep. 2024].
- ⁶ Database, E.C.F. (n.d.). Allon Plan (1967). ecf.org.il. Available at: <https://ecf.org.il/issues/issue/148>. [Accessed 24 Sep. 2024]
- ⁷ Low, J. and Moran, D. (2014). NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA THESIS Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited RELIGIOUS ZIONISM AND ISRAELI SETTLEMENT POLICY. Available at: <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA606979.pdf> [Accessed 24 Sep. 2024].
- ⁸ www.arij.org. (n.d.). 40 Years Of Israeli Occupation. Available at: <https://www.arij.org/atlas40/chapter4.2.html>. [Accessed 24 Sep. 2024].
- ⁹ Database, E.C.F. (n.d.). Sharon Plan (1977). ecf.org.il. Available at: <https://ecf.org.il/issues/issue/245>. [Accessed 24 Sep. 2024].
- ¹⁰ ECF Database (2015). Israeli PM Olmert's Convergence Plan (2006). Ecf.org.il. Available at: <https://ecf.org.il/issues/issue/259> [Accessed 24 Sep. 2024].
- ¹¹ DOCUMENTS AND SOURCE MATERIAL 195. (n.d.). Available at: https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/jps/v41i4/f_0026312_21553.pdf [Accessed 24 Sep. 2024].
- ¹² Where Do We Stand? (2017). Mordechai Kedar. Available at: <https://wheredowestand.org/mordechai-kedar/>. [Accessed 24 Sep. 2024].