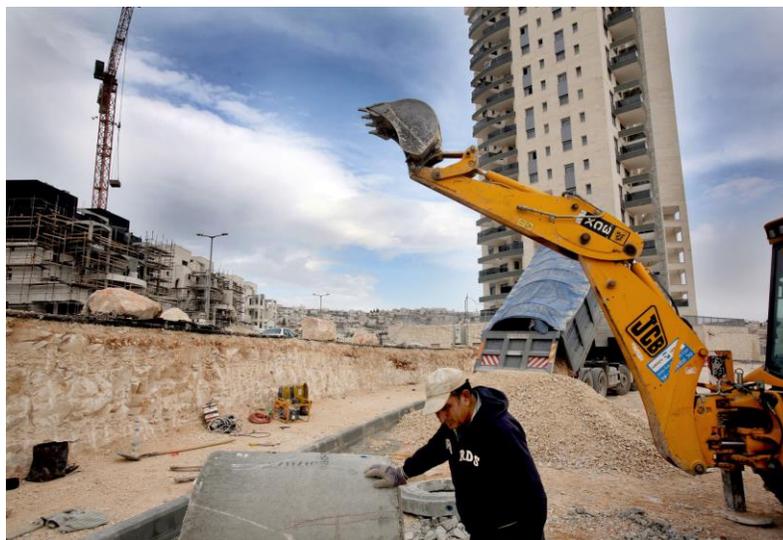


The government of unequivocal annexation:

Deepening of the settlement project, dispossession and oppression
One year of the Israeli government headed by Yair Lapid and Naftali Bennett

Settlement Watch project, June 2022



Introduction

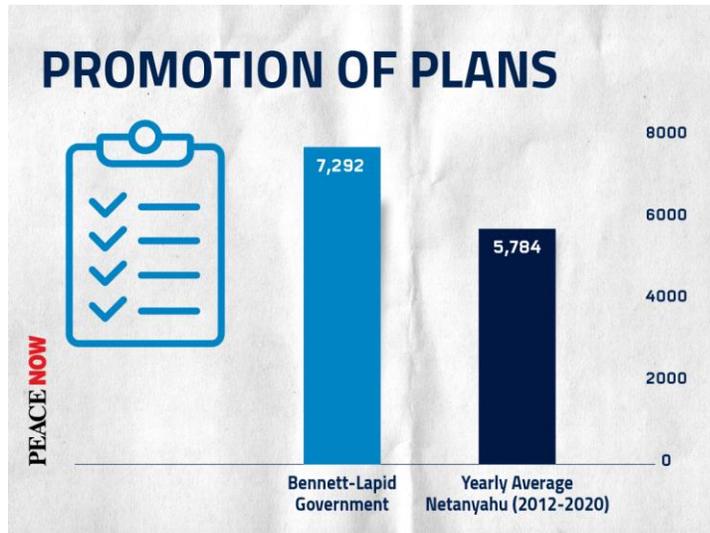
The Bennett-Lapid government started its tenure on the 13/6/21 with the statement that it would keep a status quo in everything regarding the occupation. Prime Minister Bennett said in [his speech](#): “Israel will neither annex territory nor establish a Palestinian state”. Because of the multifaceted government, which includes parties from the left as well as the right, it was expected that the government would take a balanced approach and wouldn’t neither annex aggressively nor take anti-occupation steps.

But, a year after the government is founded, it can be clearly stated that the policy of this current government not only continues the policies set by the previous Netanyahu governments, but deepens the settlements project, the dispossession and the oppression of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

This government furthers a policy of expansion and further building in the settlements and their infrastructure for Israeli settlers on the one hand, and a policy of preventing planning and building permits, house demolitions and restrictions infringing upon freedoms of Palestinians on the other hand. This process leads to annexation de facto and creating a binational apartheid state. This process has been accelerated **without any discussion or disagreement within the coalition**. The parties in the coalition that explicitly support the two-state solution have not shown interests in issues concerning the occupation, did not make demands, did not pose objections and hardly protested these dangerous steps led by the government (save a few disparate voices). As opposed to previous governments there was no governmental mechanism or forum for decision making regarding the occupation. In the absence of such a forum, ministers in the government could single handily make far-reaching steps within their jurisdiction. The Minister of Housing furthered the [plan in Atarot](#), which has a significant strategic implication for Palestinian continuity and the prospects of the two-state solution. He also published a tender for [a new settlement near Ariel](#), a far-reaching step, among other things. In his authority as the Minister for Jerusalem Affairs [he deepened the settlements](#) in East Jerusalem. In addition, the Minister of Defense had largely and an uninterrupted manner, used his authority in the Occupied Territories without any consultation within the government.

The supporters of the two-state solution in the government have not been acting to stop these actions, did not demand to be consulted and left the policies regarding the occupation to those who support the settlement project. Beyond that, those who support the settlement project in the government have been defended and legitimized by the Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, who used his image as a moderate to explain and justify this policy of intensified annexation when faced with international critique.

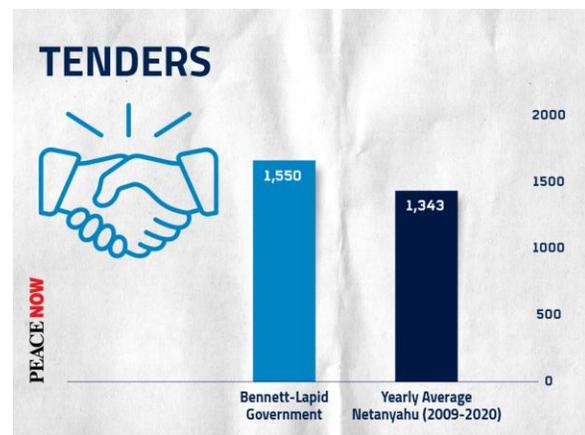
I. Construction and Development of the Settlements



Construction and planning - In all the main parameters, there was a significant increase compared to the average in the Netanyahu years:

In planning, there was a 26% increase, with the promotion of plans for 7,292 housing units in the settlements, compared to an annual average of 5,784 housing units in the Netanyahu governments (the average includes the years 2012 to 2020 in which information is available).

Tenders - The Bennett-Lapid government has issued tenders for the construction of 1,550 housing units in the settlements, compared to an annual average of 1,343 housing units per year in the Netanyahu governments (an increase of 15%). Among the tenders is a tender for the establishment of [a new settlement near Ariel](#), as well as, for the first time, a tender the Shvut Rachel settlement (98 units), which is usually not managed by tenders. The tender in Shvut Rachel is part of an effort to create a settlement continuum that cuts across the heart of the West Bank between Eli, Shilo, Amichai and the outposts around them.



Construction Starts - 62% jump in construction starts in settlements with the entry of the new government*. According to [CBS data](#), in the second half of 2021 (June to December 2021), 1,488 new housing units began to be built in the settlements, compared to a half-yearly average of 921 housing units in the Netanyahu years (2009 to half of 2021).



* It is important to note that construction starts on the ground are usually the result of a previous policy. The planning and building permits were held years or months earlier. The indication from these data on the current government policy mainly shows that it did not stop construction.

2. Plans with strategic consequences:

The rate of the annexation is measured not only by the number of housing units but their location and geo-political consequences. The Bennett-Lapid government furthered a number of strategically lethal plans that especially harm the chance for Palestinian development and continuity, the two-state solution and reaching a political agreement. Among other plans the government promoted a new settlement in [Atarot](#), the [E1 plan](#), the [expansion of the National Park around the Old City](#), a new settlement [near Ariel](#), a plan that connects [Har Homa and Givat Hamatos](#), the beginning of the construction of a new settlement in Hebron (**for the first time in 40 years**) [the completion of the plan in E2](#), and more. The swift progression of these plans, alongside other dangerous developments that deepen the occupation, make the reality between the River and the Sea a one apartheid state in which Palestinians have no political rights.

The area of the planned settlement in [Atarot \(Qalandiya\)](#). In the background are the houses of the Palestinian neighborhood of Kfar Aqeb. Secretary Blinken called Bennett a few days before the discussion of the plan and clarified the American opposition. Despite the promise of the Israeli government, the discussion of the plan was not canceled, however it was decided to postpone the decision until an environmental survey is conducted.



3. New illegal outposts

Under the Bennett-Lapid government there were six new illegal outposts founded: Givat Hadeigel in the South Hebron Hills, Karnei Re'em in the Salfit area, Mevo'ot Jericho Farm north of Jericho, Julius Farm in the North of the Jordan Valley and the Ohavey-Ya outpost West of Bethlehem. It should be noted that as opposed to previous governments, it seems that some effort has been made to stop founding new illegal outposts. Peace Now knows of at least four outposts that were founded but evicted immediately after their foundation. It seems that there has been some rise in demolitions of small outposts of hilltop youth (approximately 30 demolitions of 7 small outposts), but in all these cases no actions had been taken to stop those settlers from returning, and they did so within days.

The new outposts, and especially [the agricultural farms](#), are part of a strategy to take over thousands of dunams and disposes Palestinians from their land.



The "Mevo'ot Jericho Farm" outpost that was established in August 2021. The settlers in the outpost work daily to expel Palestinian shepherds from the area through [harassments and threats](#).

4. Support for the eviction of families in East Jerusalem in favor of settlements - The Bennett-Lapid government has been called upon several times for the burning issue of [displacing Palestinian families in East Jerusalem](#). The Supreme Court sought the Attorney General's position on the issue, and in fact gave the government a convenient opportunity to assist in preventing the massive expropriation. But as in the case of Sheikh Jarrah at the end of Netanyahu's tenure, also in the case of [Batan Al-Hawa](#), the government [chose not to intervene](#). In the case of [the Sumarin family](#) from Silwan, it even [supported the evacuation](#) of the family in favor of [the settlers of the Elad](#) organization.



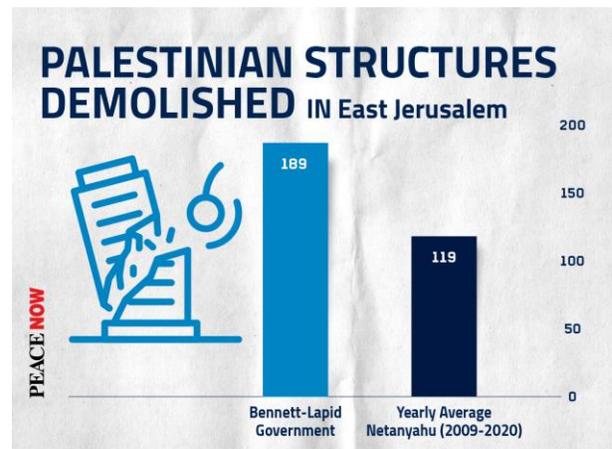
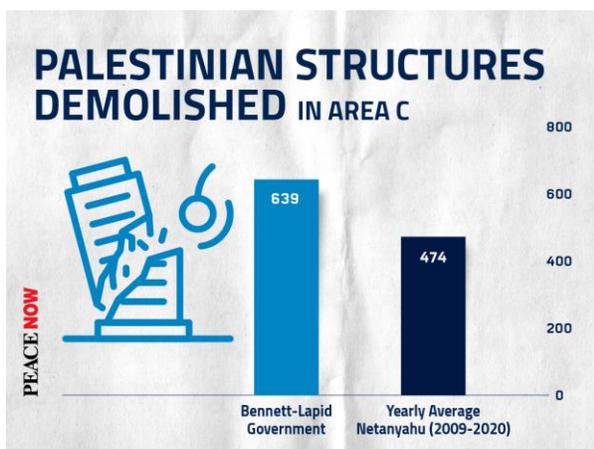
In January 2022, the government allowed the Jerusalem municipality to [demolish the Sallehiya family home](#) in Sheikh Jarrah, in favor of establishing a school, despite the enormous sensitivity and despite the fact that in the end the planned school should not be built on the ruins of the family home, but adjacent to it.

In the photo: The Sallehiya family fortified themselves on the roof of their house before the demolition, 17/1/21.

II. Deepening the expulsion of Palestinians from their land

The Bennett-Lapid government deepened the policy of expulsion of Palestinians and their restriction to the constrained enclaves in Areas A and B. This is the mirror image of deepening the settlement project. Besides taking hold of thousands of dunams by building settlements and agricultural outposts in area C, the government is working to displace Palestinians in practice by prevention of granting building permits and planning on the one hand, and demolitions of structures, infrastructures and preventing the connection to water on the other hand.

1. Demolitions:



As of the 6/6/22, the Civil Administration had [demolished 639](#) Palestinian owned structures in Area C, causing 604 people to lose their home. **This is a 35% increase compared to the average**

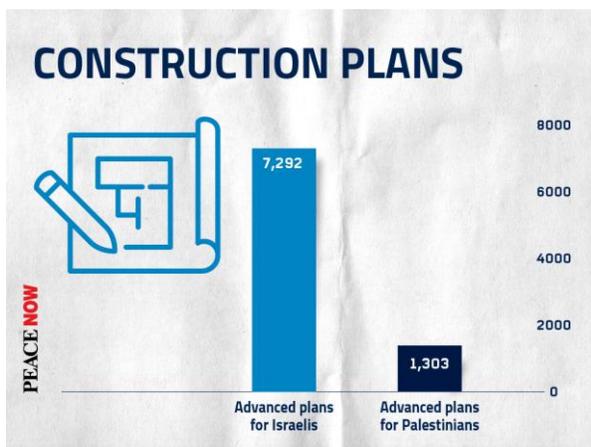
of demolitions in the Netanyahu years (474 structures per annum). In East Jerusalem there were [189 structures](#) demolished and 450 Palestinians had consequently become homeless. **This is a 59% increase compared to the Netanyahu years.**

In addition, there had been attempts to displace entire communities [in Humsa](#) and in [Ras a-Tin](#) in the Jordan Valley, and in [Masafer Yatta](#) in south Hebron Hills.

2. Construction Permits for Palestinians: in the entirety of 2021 there were only 10 building permits granted for Palestinians, compared to 1,448 housing units that started to be built¹ in the settlements in the second half of 2021 only (and 2,526 in the entirety of the year). This shows the discrepancy between the two different policies aimed at the two populations in the Occupied Territories, Palestinians and Israelis, i.e. the apartheid tendencies continued by the current government.



3. Preventing the approval of construction plans for Palestinians:



Whereas in the settlements 55 plans were approved for 7,292 housing units, the government approved only 6 plans for Palestinians with 1,303 housing units in the entire Area C.

¹ The [data of the Israeli CBS](#) on construction starts is based mainly on construction permits that were granted. In the absence of official data on number of permits in settlements, the CBS construction starts number is a good indication for the number of permits granted.

4. Addition of 40 million NIS for 'enforcement' against Palestinians

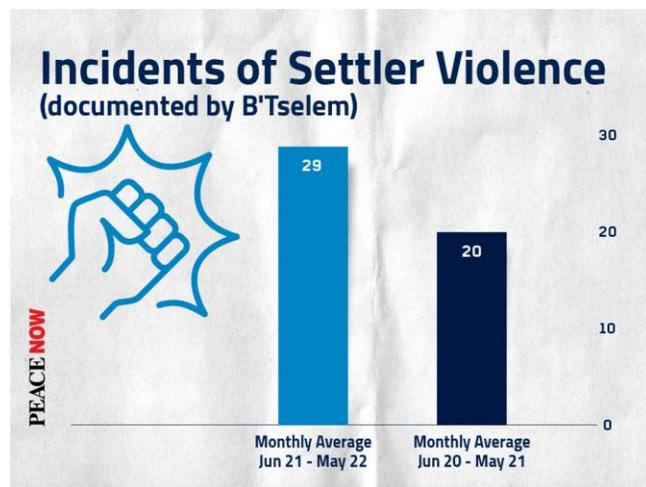
The government [passed a budget](#) of [18.5 million NIS](#) for what it refers to as 'enforcement in area C'. The budget is aimed at acquiring 46 new employees for the Civil Administration, purchasing of vehicles and equipment for inspectors to exasperate demolitions, confiscations and pushing Palestinians away from their land. In addition, in July 2021 the Ministry of Settlement approved the allocation of [around 19 million NIS](#) to local authorities of settlements in the Occupied Territories to open their own 'enforcement' surveillance units.

5. A large increase in settler violence.

Under the Bennett-Lapid government there has been an increase of approximately 45% in settler violence incidents against Palestinians and their property, (from an average of 20 incidents per month to 29 cases. These are only the cases [documented by B'tselem](#).

[Settler violence](#) is an important tool in the process of dispossession and expulsion of Palestinians. Often settlers, especially from farm outposts, attack Palestinian shepherds and farmers and chase them away from their land with threats and force. In the illegal outpost of Homesh, there is [a small group of settlers](#) who are residing there illegally, on private Palestinian land, and [prevent by force](#) from the Palestinian land owners to access their land. They enjoy the support of right wing politicians including those sitting in the government. In its response to the appeal of the Palestinian residents to the Supreme Court [the government abstained](#) from giving a deadline for the eviction of the violent settlers.

The full responsibility to prevent settler violence lies with the government, law enforcement bodies (who are meant to capture the assailants) and the IDF which is meant to prevent the attacks and protect the Palestinian residents who are under Israeli occupation.



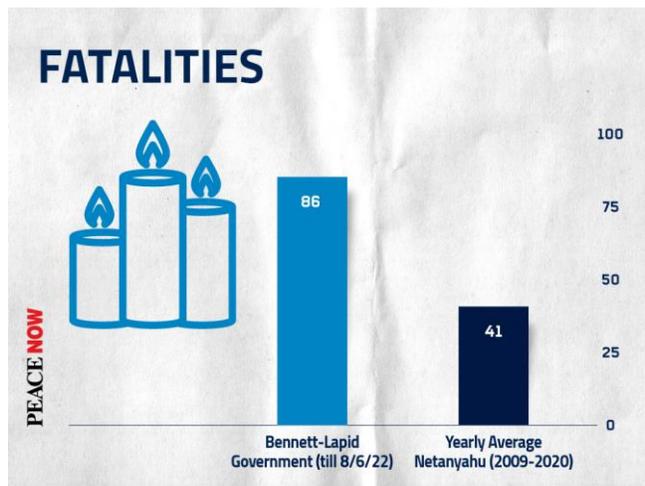
6. Declaration of a large nature reserve in area C

In an unusual step, the Bennett-Lapid government [declared 22,000 dunams](#) of land as a 'nature reserve' in the Nachal Og area south of Jericho. This means that from now on Palestinians cannot use this land, not to farm nor to herd their flocks, including the legal landowners of the land.



III. Deepening the oppression

Under the Bennett-Lapid government, there was a worsening of oppression and structural violence towards Palestinian communities, their national and religious symbols and their lives.



1. The number of Palestinians killed by Israeli Security Forces was doubled.

Under the Bennett-Lapid government there were [86 Palestinians killed](#) by security forces in the West Bank alone, in comparison to the average under the Netanyahu governments that was approximately 41 killed per annum (according to [B'tselem count](#)).

2. Temple Mount / Al-Haram A-Sharif

The Bennett-Lapid government continued the trend of the Netanyahu government in changing the reality in the Temple Mount and the erosion of the status quo. There was a continued rise of participants in Jewish organized visits to the Temple Mount and of those who pray publicly in the holy compound. The government allowed MK Itamar Ben Gvir to

hold provocative visits to the Temple Mount (something he was prevented from doing under the Netanyahu government). On “Jerusalem Day”, there were unprecedented images of thousands of Israelis who were dancing and singing on the Temple Mount. This day saw a record [2,600 organized Jewish visitors](#) in one day. At the same time, the police prevented Palestinians from entering the compound. The images of rejoicing Israelis while Palestinians are prevented from entering Al-Haram A-Sharif are the vindication of Palestinian concerns about Jewish takeover of the Muslim space of the Temple Mount.



In the photo: Jews Singing and dancing on the Temple Mount on Jerusalem Day (from a video on twitter)

3. Demonstrations of hatred and violence under the auspices of the police and the IDF – the Bennett-Lapid government allowed “[the flag parade](#)” to pass through Damascus Gate of the Old City, despite high tensions, and in so doing enabled one of the largest and most violent organized [hatred parades](#) that Jerusalem had known. Along those lines, the IDF had started to escort settlers while those [removed Palestinian flags](#) from village streets in the West Bank. One of the most blatant offenses towards Palestinian dignity was in Shirin Abu Akleh’s funeral when the world saw structural violence enacted in front of cameras, and mourners being ruthlessly assaulted by policemen. Apart from a tweet from Minister Isawi Freij and a commitment for partial investigation from the Minister of Internal Security, Omer Bar-lev, there was no condemnation or basic human empathy from the so- called ‘government of change’.

4. The designation of six Palestinian NGOs as terrorist organizations – in an unprecedented step, the Minister of Defense [designated six Palestinian NGOs](#) including leading human rights organizations (such as Al-Haq and Addameer) as terrorist organizations. In the past, Netanyahu’s government tried to persuade donors, including European countries, to stop supporting the organizations with different excuses. However, such a radical move against the Palestinian Civil Society had never been taken. Following this designation, the Bennett-Lapid government tried [to explain the background for it](#), but the international community did not join this designation, and it was determined by some

international bodies that Israel had [failed to show sufficient evidence](#) connecting the organizations to terrorist activity.

5. The citizenship law — after the previous law had expired in July 2021, the government decided to renew it. Bennett-Lapid's coalition legislated the 'citizenship and entering Israel law' which prevents giving legal status in Israel for Palestinian partners of Israeli citizens and residents. This is a blatant discriminatory act that disallows a couple in which one partner is under occupation to live as a family in Israel (thus infringing upon their human rights openly).

IV. The government's double standard: all promises aren't kept

The Bennett-Lapid government is playing a double game and in fact tries to mislead the world. On the one hand, it promises not to harm the chances for peace and to comply by the rule of law, but on the other hand— it continues the lethal settlement policy and allows lawlessness to continue freely under occupation. The Foreign Minister Lapid was sent to explain and give excuses and promise things will change, but the policy continues on the ground. For example, when Americans put pressure on [the E1 dangerous plan](#) which risks endangers Palestinian continuity, the government promised to take the plan off the agenda but several months later, [the plan was returned](#) to be promoted. This is true also with [expansion of the national park](#) around the Old City: the plan was taken off the agenda in March but is now due to be discussed in August; when settlers entered a [strategic asset in the Christian Quarter](#), the Foreign Ministry promised to remove them, but in practice they had remained and were secured by police; and the [plan in Atarot](#), equally crucial for continuity of Palestinian life and the two-state solution was not really taken down from the agenda despite government's promises but was postponed to finish an environmental survey.

On another front, the world watched closely developments on Temple Mount/Al-Haram A-Sharif during the Ramadan, and the police indeed toned down its reaction, but after Ramadan, violence escalated quickly during Shireen Abu Akleh's funeral, and allowed the [flag march](#) and its spirit, to reach the Temple Mount.

Alongside unkept promises to stop plans there were also 'hasbara' (propaganda) attempts. For instance, when a plan for a new neighborhood in East Jerusalem was approved, '[Givat Hashaked](#)', comprising of 473 units, the Foreign Ministry told diplomats it was only 12

houses. Truthfully, the plan is of 12 tower compounds of 473 housing units, but the effort was made explicitly to state this was a small and insubstantial plan. As one policy expert put it, 'the problem is that the government really believes its 'Hasbara' and its own lies'.

V. Complete capitulation to the settler lobby

On the first test that the settlers posed for the government, the [illegal outpost of Evyatar](#), the government failed miserably. The settlers were evicted from the outpost but had achieved their goal. The structures that they had put up [remained on the ground](#), and the civilian settlement was replaced by a military settlement. The IDF upkeeps the outpost regularly, the soldiers have to guard the same point established by lawless settlers, and through this process of guarding, 9 Palestinians from the neighboring village of Beita were killed by IDF fire during protests against the settlement.

Even the outpost of [Homesh](#), where a small number of settlers did not only contravene the Disengagement Law and occupy private Palestinian land, but they [use severe violence](#) towards Palestinians who live near-by, has not been evicted by the government.

Even when settlers entered the [Jabari Home in Hebron](#), without any permits, the government chose to fulfill their demand and allow capture of the house by soldiers in return of 'agreement' from the settlers to peacefully evacuate the house. Instead of enforcing the law and prevent its contravention, the government joins the delinquents and aids them.



The outpost of Evyatar, June 2021 (Photo: Tali Mayer)