

about offset by rising efficiency in water use. Alternatively, the recorded rise in area under irrigation is probably induced by a sharp increase in multiple cropping, made possible by the introduction of modern farming techniques.

Land politics

Looking at the entire West Bank land from a political perspective, one immediately notes that it lies at the heart of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Notwithstanding economic and security considerations advocated by both sides, the West Bank happens to contain the largest concentration of religious sites cherished by Christians, Moslems, and Jews. Following its victory in 1967, Israel had launched an "assault" on West Bank land of such a sweeping nature that it has been rightly described as the "great land barrier to Palestine peace."¹

Israel has taken advantage of several discrepancies in the prevailing forms of land ownership in order to achieve territorial expansion (see Table III-4). It started first by proclaiming itself as the legitimate heir to all state land. This gave it automatic control over some 12 percent of all land area. It then assumed control on land (and other property) owned by absentee Palestinians. Subsequently, it approved and encouraged transfer of West Bank land into Israeli hands, even through processes of forged deals.²

1. The Great Land Barrier to Palestine Peace, by David Lennon in the Financial Times, October 29, 1979, p 12.
2. A recent example is the sale of 569 dunums in the village of Bill'in (Ramallah district) which was effected by two local people using forged documents. The deal was invalidated by a court order on September 20, 1981 (Ref: Al-Qods Daily, September 21, 1981). But a few days later (September 28th) the Military Administration defied that order by proclaiming the same piece of land and three thousand dunums more as "training" area, hence forbidden for civilian use. (Ref: Al-Qods Daily, September 29, 1981).

Table (III - 4)

Distribution of land by form of ownership
(in thousand dunums)

<u>Type of ownership</u>	<u>Area</u>	<u>% of total</u>
Total	5,856	100.0
Privately owned	3,200	54.7
Absentee owners	430	7.3
State land	696	11.9
Land without clear title	1,500	25.6
Owned by Jews (prior to 1948)	30	0.5

Source: Israel's Ministry of Defence, quoted by David Lennon in the Financial Times, October 29, 1979).

But more significantly the Military Administration has confiscated or closed extensive areas of privately owned land, initially for "security" reasons, but turning them later into civilian settlements. At other times confiscation is explicitly effected for the purpose of establishing settlements and constructing needed roads, all for "public interests".

It is very difficult to give accurate estimates of the areas which have been requisitioned by Israel through various means, especially in that the first Begin Government was particularly aggressive on West Bank land during its last year in office. But a relatively old and conservative estimate puts this figure at 1.88 million dunums (34 percent of total area) distributed as follows:¹

dunums

61,000	Privately owned and confiscated for military necessities
80,000	"Purchased" by Israelis
42,151	Expropriated for public purposes
970,000	Closed for military purposes
696,000	State land
30,000	Previously owned by Jews

1. David Lennon, op cit.