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Settlement Monitor

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# SETTLEMENT MONITOR

EDITED BY GEOFFREY ARONSON

*This section covers items—reprinted articles, statistics, and maps—pertaining to Israeli settlement activities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. Unless otherwise stated, the items have been written by Geoffrey Aronson for this section or drawn from material written by him for Report on Israeli Settlement in the Occupied Territories (hereinafter Settlement Report), a Washington-based bimonthly newsletter published by the Foundation for Middle East Peace. JPS is grateful to the foundation for permission to draw on its material. Major documents relating to settlements appear in the Documents and Source Material section.*

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## **OUT OF GAZA, INTO THE JORDAN VALLEY**

### **ISRAEL PREPARES TO LEAVE GAZA . . . AND REMAIN IN THE WEST BANK**

*From Settlement Report, July–August 2005.*

20 April 2005 was an unheralded date in the history of Israel's 38-year occupation of the Gaza Strip, but it is arguably the most important since the conquest of Gaza in June 1967. On this date, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) began dismantling the military infrastructure that is at the heart of the occupation, and whose presence enabled the creation of a parallel system of civilian occupation.

Throughout Israel's short history, civilian settlement and military power have been symbiotic elements of a unified strategic and political-territorial vision. The creation of settlements without IDF protection was viewed as impossible. Similarly, military occupation without settlements was hardly contemplated. When it was, as in Lebanon

from 1978 to 2000, public opposition to the deployment of troops beyond Israel's borders forced the IDF to withdraw. Accordingly, the end of the story of Israeli settlements in Gaza was decreed when the IDF began withdrawing in April.

The evacuation of Gaza's settler population, which by early summer numbered less than 6,000, at least half of them children, was slated to commence in earnest in August and be finalized within a month. By year's end, Israeli military forces will bring their long sojourn in Gaza, almost certainly including the Philadelphi corridor along Gaza's border with Egypt, to an end, opening a new chapter for the Palestinian citizens of the area.

Why did the tremendous investment in securing Gaza during the decades since 1967 fail to assure Israel's permanent presence? Why do Israelis, particularly Israel's leadership, concede, as Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz's candidly observed, that Israel's settlement effort in Gaza was nothing less than a "historic mistake"? And what lessons does

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the retreat from Gaza hold for Israel's occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which are coveted by Palestinians as part of their rightful inheritance?

***A Change in Israel's Security Concept***

Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip is the latest example of a reassessment of Israel's national security requirements that began with the Israeli-Egyptian entente that followed the October 1973 war. Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai peninsula in 1982 reflected the conclusion reached by Israeli leaders that Israel's security could be *enhanced* by a new doctrine of withdrawal of its soldiers and settlers from Egyptian territory, particularly after the Israel-Egypt peace treaty ended the historical threat of a land invasion by Egypt through Gaza. This change in doctrine occurred less than a decade after Moshe Dayan had famously declared that Sharm al-Shaykh without peace was preferable to peace without Sharm al-Shaykh.

Like the stalemate on the Egyptian front before the 1973 war, the occupation of Gaza after its pacification in the early 1970s was viewed by Israelis as entirely manageable and to Israel's advantage. Israeli leaders, however, never envisioned the settlement enterprise in Gaza as a tool for demographic engineering. Whatever dreams Israelis brought with them to Gaza in 1967 on this score were soon dispelled by Gaza's exploding population and the failure of half-hearted refugee resettlement schemes. Nevertheless, the demographic anomaly of more than a million Palestinians opposed by a few thousand Israeli settlers, who, defended by the IDF, controlled almost a third of Gaza, did not limit Israel's territorial appetite as long as Israelis could pretend that Palestinians had accepted their lot and the costs of occupation were deemed manageable.

The first intifada that erupted against Israeli rule in the last days of 1987 forced Israel to confront the growing costs of occupation, and nowhere more so than in Gaza. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's disenchantment with Israel's rule over Gaza and the need for withdrawal is said to date to this era.

The 1994 Gaza-Jericho agreement between Israel and the PLO transferred certain administrative and security functions to the newly created Palestinian Authority. The Oslo process, however, did not change Israel's status in Gaza as an occupying power, its ability to exercise military power, or its policy of settlement expansion. Rather, the

Oslo understandings created a new diplomatic and operational framework for Israel to continue reaping what it still believed were advantages of overall control in Gaza without forcing it to modify the historic combination of military security and civilian settlement. Domestic, international, and indeed Palestinian pressure to reconsider Israel's status in Gaza disappeared after 1994. During the Oslo years the settler population in Gaza increased by almost 70 percent.

The perception that the Oslo arrangements reduced the burdens of Israeli rule in Gaza was short-lived. The historical record suggests, not surprisingly, that the increased security-related burdens and costs created by Palestinian rebellion that resumed during the 1990s and erupted with unprecedented intensity after September 2000 forced Israel to reconsider the advantages of continuing occupation. It was only in this context of increasing costs, and not only in human life, that references were made to the demographic folly of Israel's settlement enterprise in Gaza.

***The "End of Occupation" in Gaza***

Israel has been engaged for many years in an effort to relieve itself of the burden of responsibility for the everyday affairs of Palestinians under its rule without compromising its ability to exercise preeminent military control and settle the land. Sharon, however, is the first Israeli leader whose central, declared objective is "to free Israel in the international sphere, from responsibility for the Gaza Strip" by ending Israel's occupation there.

The plan to deploy Israeli forces permanently outside of Gaza, including a preference to surrender control of the Gaza-Egypt border to the Egyptian military, and the evacuation of all settlements, links Sharon's Gaza plan with the Sinai evacuation and Prime Minister Ehud Barak's more recent retreat from South Lebanon rather than the Oslo agreements of the 1990s. As in these cases, Sharon has confronted widespread skepticism that Israel's interests can be maximized by withdrawal rather than by occupation, and by evacuation rather than by settlement. His adoption of these policies, at odds with Israeli practice during its short history, is viewed by its proponents as *increasing* Israel's ability to deter Palestinian attacks and if necessary to defend itself in the future.

To ensure continued strategic dominance of the Gaza Strip, Sharon intends to use familiar instruments of border control with Gaza

as well as a form of deterrence not unlike that which Israel has established vis-à-vis Hizballah along the Lebanese frontier. Indeed, notwithstanding the draconian security regime imposed on the West Bank, according to Alex Fishman in *Yedi'ot Abaronot*, "The assessment in the general staff is that around Gaza after disengagement, the Palestinians will have an interest in preserving calm so the main focus of the Palestinian fighting will be in the West Bank."

In contrast, the iron embrace between security and settlement in the West Bank appears unbroken. There is scant evidence that Israel is prepared to apply to the West Bank and East Jerusalem the dramatic change in doctrine that enabled the decision to evacuate Gaza or to countenance the creation of the territorial preconditions in these areas for the efficient and effective exercise of Palestinian authority. No alternative to occupation of the West Bank has proved acceptable to Israel's leaders as a means to protect prevailing concepts of national security. In this arena, the IDF is redeploying along the separation barrier and around the four small northern West Bank settlements on the evacuation list in order to *stay*. Most important of all, Israel views the costs of permanent occupation in the West Bank as manageable . . . for now.

#### JEWISH SETTLERS IN JORDAN VALLEY TO BE DOUBLED

*From Aljazeera.com, 25 June 2005.*

The Israeli ministry of agriculture has drawn up plans to double the number of illegal Jewish settlers living in the sparsely-populated Jordan Valley area of the West Bank, a spokesman for the ministry said.

"The plan which has already won approval from within different ministries will increase the number of residents in 21 settlements by 50 percent in a year and then by a further 50 percent in the following year," spokesman Benjamin Rom said.

A total of 6,300 illegal settlers currently live in the Jordan Valley, according to official figures.

According to Rom the plan would involve a major increase in agricultural subsidies and the development of tourism in the area which also incorporates the Dead Sea.

The plan would be submitted within two weeks to an inter-ministerial commission on rural affairs, which is chaired by Agriculture Minister Israel Katz. According to a report in the Israeli *Yedi'ot Abaronot* daily, Katz had already coordinated the plan with

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office director general Ilan Cohen. Furthermore, Israel's finance ministry's budget director has approved the plan.

The overall cost for the project, which will see at least 50 housing units built per year, is expected to reach \$32 million, the paper added.

Under the terms of the internationally backed road map peace plan, Israel must freeze all settlement activity, but the government has continued to come up with expansion and illegal occupation schemes.

Sharon believes that Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip allows the Jewish state to strengthen its occupation of the West Bank, where the vast majority of the 245,000 illegal settlers live.

Katz, one of the most right-wing members of Sharon's cabinet, has been a consistent skeptic on the Gaza withdrawal which is due to begin in mid-August. "The answer to . . . [resistance fighters] is strengthening Israeli settlements in the Jordan Valley," he told *Yedi'ot Abaronot*.

"Abu Mazin [Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas] and the leaders of the [resistance] organizations will look out the Muqata [leadership compound] window every morning and see the Israeli Jordan Valley flourishing."

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who held talks with Sharon in Jerusalem last weekend, has consistently warned Israel against creating "facts on the ground."

#### NO FREEZE IN THE VALLEY

*From Americans for Peace Now's Middle East Peace Report 7, no. 1, 1 August 2005.*

Sure, the road map requires Israel to freeze all settlement activity (including natural growth). But that didn't stop Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Housing Minister Yitzhak Herzog, and Deputy Minister in the Vice Premier's Office Orit Noked from participating in a special meeting of the social-economic cabinet that was held in the Jordan Valley "to stress the great commitment the ministerial committee has to the Rift and its residents." Turns out that they decided to express this commitment by expanding the campaign to attract new settlers to the Jordan Valley with NIS 2.2 million in financial incentives. As part of the new campaign, recently released soldiers who commit to living in the Valley for four years will receive a grant covering college tuition, a subsistence allowance, and free rent throughout the period. The overall value of the incentive package totals at least NIS

150,000. The decision to lure another 50 settler couples to the Jordan Valley follows an earlier recruitment program aimed at attracting 200 couples to the same part of the occupied territories. Incidentally, the average salary of employees living in the West Bank and Gaza is already 23 percent higher than the average salary in Israeli development towns and 47 percent higher than in Israeli Arab communities.

#### OUTPOSTS CONTINUE TO GROW

##### SO LEGAL, THIS JUNGLE

*The article excerpted here, written by Akiva Eldar, appeared in Ha'Aretz on 29 July 2005. The full text is available online at [www.haaretz.com](http://www.haaretz.com).*

Judging by his knitted skullcap, his beard and his biography, it is hard to imagine that the settlers would use the family name of officer and attorney Shlomo Politis to accuse him of leftist political leanings. In January 2004, the right-wing weekly *Makor Rishon* wrote that the last year of the legal adviser of the Judea and Samaria region was characterized by constant clashes with the activists in the illegal outposts. The conflict with the Jewish lawbreakers came after the compensation agreement that Politis signed at the time with Arab merchants in Hebron, whose shops were shut "for security reasons." The settlers in Hebron incited MKs from the right against him and demanded the head of the supreme legal authority in the West Bank. They got what they wanted. Citizen Politis is now watching the situation from his home in Jerusalem's Ramot neighborhood, and he warns that after the disengagement, when the government wants to carry out its commitment to evacuate the illegal outposts, it will turn out that time, in other words the foot-dragging, has worked against it.

Because of his doubts regarding the implementation of attorney Talia Sasson's report on the illegal outposts in the West Bank, Politis thinks we should be aware that time is playing into the hands of the lawbreakers. He explains that Jordanian law, which is still in force in the territories, limits the possibility of taking steps against "veteran squatters." A delay of several months, a few new mobile homes and a linkup to electricity is enough to protect the outposts from evacuation. Politis has warned about that for years. In vain. He also warned in vain about public construction on private Palestinian lands in established settlements, such as Beit El B and Ofra.

The political leadership is aware of the legal difficulty of evacuating long-term squatters. According to a senior government official, very soon there will be a substantial change in the legal status of the outposts, so that "seniority" will not help those outposts that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon promised U.S. President George W. Bush to evacuate. . . .

##### *Sasson's Only Supporter*

Politis paid a price for his refusal to bend the law in the territories according to dictates from above. Attorney Sasson, the author of the outpost report submitted to the prime minister, knew Politis well. He was a member of the team enforcing the law against those guilty of rebellion and incitement, which she headed in 1998. Politis was the only one of the senior military personnel who supported Sasson's position, demanding that the crimes of illegal construction by the settlers be added to the list of criminal offenses in the law. Sasson is prepared to say only that "enforcing the law was always a consideration for Shlomo Politis, he worked to the best of his ability to enforce the rule of law, but unfortunately, one person cannot do it by himself." . . .

[Politis] didn't need the Sasson report to learn that the "tower and stockade" doctrine (establishing facts on the ground overnight, without official permission) has not disappeared from the country, and is still operating in the territories. He is very familiar with the method of evading the commitments to the Americans to freeze the establishment of new settlements, by establishing "neighborhoods" within the generous jurisdiction of existing settlements. He also knows that the most senior government officials gave instructions to channel money to fund the outposts. He says that "the system has done very little to counter squatting on private lands. In order for the authorities to take steps, the owner of the land has to submit a complaint to the police. Many don't even know about the squatting, others are in detention, this one is afraid to go to the police, and that one has lost his faith in the Israeli regime."

##### *Lack of Motivation*

Politis is unwilling to bet the report will have any more of an effect on the situation than did the Shamgar report, for example, which was written in the wake of the massacre at the Tomb of the Patriarchs (by Jewish doctor Baruch Goldstein, in 1994) and recommended reinforcing the police presence

in the area. He testifies that the Judea and Samaria district suffers from a lack of means and a lack of motivation. The police do not handle the uprooting of Palestinians' trees by settlers in the same way they handle Arab damage to Jewish property. Thus, building offenses by Arabs are vigorously pursued by the civil administration. "The distance between a report and enforcement is very great. When it comes to Jews, enforcement is no more than going through the motions. Although the heads of Central Command are sovereign in the area, the Palestinian interest has never concerned them," testifies Politis.

He tells of a sharply worded letter that he sent to the Hebron Brigade commander, Colonel Noam Tibon, after Tibon said in a newspaper interview that his job is to protect the settlers, and leveled criticism at the Israel Police for harassing them for no reason. He describes Hebron as "an extra-territorial area that the political system isn't managing to deal with. There were fears all along that the issue would blow up, and attorney general Rubinstein held quite a few discussions about it at the time. He gave the political leaders a few weeks to make a decision, but they always told us that the time wasn't right. The commanders are afraid of confronting the Hebron settlers, and instead of declaring that the time had come to allow the merchants to open their shops, because the Arabs have to make a living, they placed the responsibility on us, the attorneys, and apologized [to the settlers] that the attorneys were pressuring them."

In February 1998, during the government of Benjamin Netanyahu, Politis reported to the JAG on an increase in irregular incidents in the areas of planning and construction and lands, and ended with the words "there is no sign that the authorities are standing in the breach." In August 1999, a short time after Barak took over the government, Politis wrote to the head of the command that the transport and installation of the mobile homes was creating an impression that the right hand of the authorities didn't know what the left hand was doing. He mentioned cases in which the settlers who received demolition orders presented permits from the head of the infrastructure division of the civil administration to install the mobile homes. Head of Central Command Moshe Ya'alon shrugged off responsibility. He replied that he had never given an order granting immunity to mobile homes installed in the outposts in violation of the law.

### *"A Political Masquerade"*

A short time later, Politis was invited to a special meeting of the interministerial committee on settlement affairs on the subject of the outposts. "I reported that there were totally illegal outposts, including some that had been built on private land, and that there were some that were built on state lands and were in the midst of a process of preparation," says the prosecutor. "Barak didn't want to hear. He interrupted me and declared that for his part everything was illegal and that they all had to be evacuated immediately." A few months later, Barak reached the "outpost agreement" with the settlers, which determined that Barak would give instructions to leave 32 outposts in place, and in exchange, the settlers promised (and in the end didn't keep their promise) to voluntarily evacuate 10 outposts, half of them unpopulated. "Barak fled," accused Politis, and calls the agreement "a political masquerade."

"Suddenly it was as though all the legal regulations were nonexistent. Nobody checked what was legal and what was illegal," says Politis. "What should the settlers understand from that? What is the message to officials of the civil administration? Why make an effort, when everyone knows that in the end Zambish will go to the top and the proceeding will be halted? Wallerstein doesn't miss an opportunity to announce that everything he does is done under authority and with permission, whether of the prime minister, or of the defense minister, or of the deputy minister for settlement affairs."

He says the head of Central Command Major General Yitzhak Eytan, who accompanied Prime Minister Sharon on a visit in the area of the outpost Tal Binyamin (which was built in the memory of right-wing activist Binyamin Kahane, who was murdered with his wife in a drive-by shooting in October 2000), explained that his legal adviser claimed the outpost was illegal, and the reply was: "Who does this adviser think he is? There's a hill? Go up."

Politis says the atmosphere among the Israeli authorities in the West Bank is that in the Wild West anything goes. "Once it's the Barak agreement and once it's the Fuad [Benjamin Ben-Eliezer] agreement, and once it's Sharon who has decided that a certain outpost is a strategic location, and quick as a wink they approve it. Only when the media wake up does the system go into a frenzy."

Politis cites Ahaz Ben Ari, former head of the international law division in the military prosecutor's office, who was asked to speak

about the legal situation in the territories and summed up his lecture with the words: "There is no law." He doesn't know any officers who "banged on the table," as he puts it, and opposed the domination of the laws of the jungle in the West Bank. However, he suggests looking for the main guilty parties among the political leadership, which collaborates with the lawbreakers, whether by closing an eye, or by winking at them. The legal jungle, he sums up, doesn't begin and doesn't end on the eastern side of the Green Line.

#### DOZENS OF BUILDINGS ERECTED IN OUTPOSTS IN LAST THREE MONTHS

*The article excerpted here, written by Amos Harel and Nir Hasson, appeared in Ha'Aretz on 6 June 2005. The full text is available online at [www.haaretz.com](http://www.haaretz.com).*

Not a thing has changed in the government's handling of illegal settlement outposts in the three months since a comprehensive report on the issue was completed, the report's author, attorney Talia Sasson, said Sunday.

Speaking at a seminar on the settlements organized by Ben-Gurion University, Sasson said that building in the West Bank outposts was continuing just as before. "Since the report was submitted, nothing has happened," she said. "It was well publicized, and that's good, but everything is continuing. Perhaps the Housing Ministry has closed a few taps, but there has been no operative decision and construction continues in the outposts."

"The goal of the report was to end the illegal construction," the former government attorney added. "This is not a matter of political outlook; we are talking about the state violating its own laws, and when a state's own authorities break the law, this is a severe blow to the rule of law. When such things happen, the democratic system is liable to be undermined."

A *Ha'Aretz* investigation confirmed Sasson's statement that outpost construction continues as usual; the only change it found is a slight improvement in the defense establishment's gathering of information about such construction.

Following the *Ha'Aretz* report, Interior Minister Ofer Pines-Paz said a government that does not respect the law encourages people to violate it. "The current reality is a result of inaction by the government, which is blocking the implementation of the Sasson report's recommendations, and the evacuation of six outposts immediately."

In the wake of the *Ha'Aretz* investigation, Yahad MK Haim Oron called Monday for an urgent Knesset session to discuss the matter.

"Under the umbrella of disengagement and the shelter of the government, YESHA leaders and elements within the military continue to get around the law," Oron said, referring to the YESHA Council of settlements. "It hardly makes sense that the government conducts a war against illegal building in the Arab sector even as flagrant violations of the law continue in the settlements and outposts."

Defense establishment data shows that during the first five months of this year, there were 197 incidents of illegal Jewish construction in the West Bank, of which about two-thirds occurred after the Sasson Report was published. But the illegal buildings were destroyed in only 37 cases—mostly by the settlers at the army's request, rather than by the Israel Defense Forces themselves.

Sources knowledgeable about the outposts said that the construction figures are slightly higher than they were in previous years, but this does not necessarily mean that the amount of illegal construction has increased. It is also possible, they said, that the defense establishment has simply started paying more attention to the phenomenon.

However, they added, nothing has been done that would signal to the settlers that the state has changed its attitude toward construction in the outposts, despite Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's adoption of Sasson's scathing report—which he commissioned—and his establishment of a ministerial committee to discuss the implementation of the report's conclusions, which is supposed to finish its work next week.

While the IDF has issued orders to halt construction in the outposts, it has not tried to enforce them, because the government does not want to pick a fight with the settlers over the outposts during the run-up to the disengagement. The government has said that it will start dealing with the outposts only after the withdrawal from Gaza and the northern West Bank is completed. It first committed to dismantle the outposts in the 2002 road map peace plan and has reiterated this promise many times since, but to date, only a few inhabited outposts have been dismantled—and in some of these cases, the residents later rebuilt them.

The defense establishment's only real success thus far in the battle against illegal building in the outposts has been in preventing mobile homes from being brought into

the outposts. Even here, however, the settlers seem to have found a way around the problem: Instead of living in mobile homes, many outpost residents are simply building permanent houses—and government agencies are turning a blind eye, and sometimes even providing indirect assistance.

Most of the outposts where widespread permanent construction is taking place are in the Ramallah area, under the jurisdiction of the Benjamin Regional Council. These include Palgei Mayim, near Eli, between Ramallah and Nablus, and Amuna, near Ofra, north of Ramallah. Security sources define Amuna as “blatantly illegal,” but it nevertheless finished building nine houses recently and is even offering them for sale. There is also widespread construction in Bruchin, between Pdu’el and Aley Zahav, west of Ariel.

Last week, GOC Central Command Yair Naveh sent an angry letter to the head of the Yesha Council of settlements, Bentzi Lieberman, after the council distributed a letter to all the settlements in which it defined Brigadier General Ilan Paz, the head of the Civil Administration in the West Bank, as *persona non grata* and urged residents to keep him and his inspectors out of their settlements.

In his letter, Naveh stressed that Paz is an integral part of the army and said the council’s decision “constitutes a severe and unacceptable injury to the IDF and everything it represents. . . . We will continue to act according to the laws of the country, while also continuing to support the settlements. The IDF views your letter very gravely and expects you to rescind its contents.”

#### LESSONS FROM ISRAEL’S RETREAT FROM GAZA

*From Settlement Report, September-October 2005.*

At 7 A.M. on the morning of 12 September 2005, three IDF soldiers unceremoniously locked the gate at Gaza’s Kissufim crossing point. A few Palestinians approached warily from their side of the just-closed border with Israel. After brief remarks by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) commander before a small crowd of journalists, who except for the distant Palestinians provided the only audience for the historic event, Israel’s failed policy “creating facts” on the ground came to an anticlimactic end.

The withdrawal, wrote Yehoshua Porath, an Israeli scholar who has written widely

on Palestinian nationalism, “was foreseeable and could have been predicted from the very first moment when Israel commenced its folly of building settlements in the Gaza Strip. . . . Even if Israel had millions of reserve inhabitants and were ready and able to settle there and to transform Gaza’s national character into Jewish- Israeli, there would have been no room for them, either physically or economically. . . . Only a mystical-messianic belief in divine intervention in human destinies can explain why various Israeli governments and parties initiated this folly. The Israeli government decision to evacuate the Gaza Strip results principally from the realization that this situation could not be maintained forever.”

To say that the failure of Israel’s occupation was inevitable, however, does not answer questions critical to understanding the circumstances that compelled Israel to acknowledge it as such. If the collapse of occupation in Gaza was preordained, why didn’t Israel evacuate in 1970, 1980, 1994, or 2003? The following are some lessons that could perhaps be drawn from the end of Israel’s ill-fated venture.

#### ***1. Facts on the ground are not necessarily permanent.***

The Gaza evacuation demonstrates that settlements are not necessarily permanent. Settlement facts on the ground, in and of themselves, do not assure permanent Israeli control over territory or even establish the basis for a secure and permanent Israeli-Jewish presence.

#### ***2. An Israeli majority supported the evacuation of Gaza settlements.***

The popular antipathy of Israelis toward Gaza and its Palestinian residents is of relatively recent vintage. During most of the 1970s and 1980s, Israelis traveled, toured, and did business with the Palestinians of Gaza, who themselves traveled and worked almost without restriction throughout Israel.

The first intifada, erupting in December 1987, marked the beginning of the end of this comparatively benign relationship. As early as 1992, the Labor party’s Yitzhak Rabin campaigned for election with the promise to “Get Gaza out of Tel Aviv,” where knife-wielding Palestinians raised the costs of continuing occupation for Israelis who had hitherto been little bothered by the status quo. Both Sharon and Rabin traced their disenchantment with Israel’s occupation of Gaza to this period.

Gaza's revolt against Israeli rule did not end during the Oslo years. Settlements became armed camps, and the interests of Palestinians living there were sacrificed to the settlers' wellbeing. This confrontation only hardened during the al-Aqsa intifada of 2000–2004.

In Israel, the depth of popular alienation from the settlement enterprise in Gaza, and the limited social base of its supporters, became clear during the failed campaign led by settlement and rabbinic leaders to stop the evacuation. Indeed, most Israelis were "disengaged" from the year-long debate about the Gaza settlements' future. According to a poll conducted by the New Wave released on Channel 10 days before the August evacuation, only about a third of those polled even knew where Gush Katif was located. It is difficult to create a national trauma over the evacuation of places that most Israelis cannot find on a map.

***3. The decision to evacuate settlements in Gaza marks an acknowledgment that Israeli security can be enhanced without settlements and military occupation.***

The creation of civilian Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip was an integral part of a strategic concept that sought to create a stable Israeli settler population that would make military occupation acceptable to the Israeli public. After the June 1967 conquests, Israeli strategists believed that without settlements to guard and protect, the military occupation of Gaza could not long endure.

Israel's withdrawal from Sinai in 1982 challenged this strategy, just as Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 seemed to confirm it. Under certain circumstances Israeli policymakers believed that Israeli security could be enhanced by withdrawal and evacuating settlements. More recently, Sharon, prompted by a potent combination of increasing human and political costs, determined that settlements in Gaza had become a security liability, whatever the risks posed by withdrawal.

***4. The settler lobby is not all powerful.***

At the height of the Oslo process, a prominent leader of the settler movement warned a high ranking Palestinian official that no Israeli policy toward the settlements could be adopted without settler support. This political axiom, which was adopted, by choice or fear, by a generation of political leaders

from Israel's ruling parties, has now been undermined. Although political opposition to the Gaza disengagement plan was highest in the ruling Likud party, popular opposition failed to resonate beyond a minority in the Orthodox religious right-wing. The rulings, warnings, and curses of the rabbis against those who would "expel Jews" were ignored by most Israelis. "There is sympathy for the settlers," wrote one columnist during the summer protests, "but the football game on TV was more important."

***5. Israel can be compelled to revise its strategy of creating facts.***

In 1976 Ariel Sharon was 48 years old. As an IDF commander, he had defeated a Palestinian insurgency in Gaza earlier in the decade. Like most Israelis and its supporters in the West, he believed Israel had established a "benevolent" and low-cost occupation. In his eyes, "Arabs," including those who were Israeli citizens as well as those living in the occupied territories under IDF control, were viewed as a monolith. Sharon, like all Israeli leaders of the period, was well aware of the growing Palestinian population west of the Jordan River. But he dismissed its political and moral importance, arguing that the only way for Israel to preserve demographic hegemony and a Jewish democratic state was to retreat to what he mockingly described as "the patriotic borders of 1947," that is, the borders outlined in the UN Partition Plan. In Sharon's view, the 1.2 million Palestinians then living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip represented a marginal factor in Israel's self-image as a Jewish democratic state and could not be considered a constraint to permanent Israeli rule in territories conquered a decade earlier.

In a five-minute televised address on the eve of Gaza's evacuation, however, Sharon sang a different tune. "We cannot hold onto Gaza forever. More than 1 million Palestinians live there and double their number with each generation. They live in uniquely crowded conditions in refugee camps, in poverty and despair, in hotbeds of rising hatred with no hope on the horizon."

It was not a newfound concern about the demographic contest, which has been an inescapable part of the Israeli/Palestinian landscape for more than one century, that forced upon policymakers like Sharon and Rabin the realization that Israel could not remain in direct occupation of Gaza permanently. Rather, it was the Palestinian rebellion that dawned in December 1987 and continued

in Gaza for most of the subsequent 18 years. There was no single event, no particular strategy of revolt—knife attacks in Jaffa markets, Qassam firings into Sederot and the Katif bloc, bombings of military convoys moving out of Netzarim or Philadelphi, or suicide bombings in Tel Aviv—that tipped the balance in favor of withdrawal. But only in the context of this broad Palestinian revolt was the self-evident “demographic threat” able to gain political currency in Israel.

Still, it would be risky to conclude that the Gaza withdrawal is a prelude to additional evacuations in the other territories conquered in June 1967. The retreat from Gaza has placed Israel’s occupation squarely within a broader historical experience. When costs outweigh benefits, nations, usually after exhausting all other possibilities, are compelled to do as the balance of forces dictates. It was not easy for Israel’s leadership to reconsider the value of long-held policies that tied Israeli security to the fate of its settlements in Gaza, but persistent Palestinian opposition to the status quo left them little choice.

Israeli policymakers have yet to solve the crisis caused by Palestinian opposition to Israeli plans to dominate and settle the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Since 1967, Israel, with the international community in tow, has implemented an array of policies meant to keep the fruits of its 1967 victory at manageable cost. The Oslo accords and the separation barrier now being constructed in the West Bank are two of the more recent examples of this ongoing effort to give Israel

both security and settlements. The retreat from Gaza suggests a different outcome.

#### SHORT TAKE

*From Settlement Report, July–August 2005.*

I traveled to Ramallah and I saw your [settlement] construction with my own eyes. It is not possible to operate in the territories in a manner that will change the situation before discussions on final status. True, the president promised the prime minister to consider the realities on the ground and concentrations of population—this is very important and the United States stands behind this commitment. But the president added that it is clear to all sides that the final borders will be determined only through negotiation. We cannot sanction creating a new reality on the ground by actions that continue today. I mean by this those activities in Jerusalem and its environs meant to change the reality on the ground. I saw these things with my own eyes and I am very concerned.

We want very much to support Israel in this critical period, and we recognize the sensitivity of the situation, but it is impossible to sanction the continuation of construction and its influence on the final border. This is very important to us. I traveled close to Ma’ale Adumim, and I saw the construction along the way.

—Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, in a conversation with Israeli foreign minister Silvan Shalom, as reported in *Ma’ariv*, 26 June 2005



Right-wing Israeli demonstrators hold up posters in front of Israeli PM Ariel Sharon’s residence during his meeting with PA Pres. Mahmud Abbas in Jerusalem, 21 June 2005. (Pedro Ugarte/AFP/Getty Images)