

REPORT ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENT IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

A Bimonthly Publication of the Foundation for Middle East Peace

Volume 14 Number 5

September–October 2004

FOR DISENGAGEMENT TO WORK, GAZA'S OCCUPATION MUST END

By Geoffrey Aronson

“The disengagement plan will go ahead without any postponements according to the dates that have been set, without a single day's delay from what the government decided.”

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon remains adamant that his plan to end Israel's occupation of the Gaza Strip will be realized. In the months since the policy was announced, domestic opposition to the plan has consolidated, including within Sharon's own Likud Party. Settler, religious, and right-wing movements have voiced increasingly radical opposition to retreat from Gaza and to Sharon and others identified with it, while the overwhelming public support for withdrawal still lacks an articulate political voice. Palestinians, although supporting an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, are almost uniformly skeptical of Sharon's intentions as well as his ability

to maneuver through the political obstacles that his domestic opponents are creating to wreck the scheme.

The international community has been all but absent from efforts to influence the content and execution of withdrawal. Egypt, which is engaged in parallel security dialogues with Israel and Palestinian factions, and the World Bank, which in early September completed an in depth review of economic issues associated with an Israeli withdrawal, are prominent exceptions to this international disregard. The Bank, however, has no mandate to lead the international political response to the plan, and Egypt needs an international framework for disengagement that includes political and economic incentives as well as security assurances from Israel.

The Bush administration has shown little interest in promoting an expanded Israeli withdrawal that would benefit all parties and contribute to the success of its own regional objectives. Instead it has expressed its support for the plan by deferring to Sharon's agenda to gain U.S. concessions regarding settlement expansion on the West Bank.

The lack of engagement by the Bush administration and others on the scope of Israel's withdrawal has increased the ability of Israel's rightwing-settler coalition to narrow the plan's options. Nowhere is their power more evident than in Israel's decision, contrary to Sharon's initial intentions, to demolish much of Gaza's settlement infrastructure and to remain in control of Gaza's

“Philadelphi” border strip with Egypt.

The ability of Sharon's opponents to dominate the domestic debate on disengagement is a reflection of political missteps by the prime minister and the demonstrated ability of the settlement community to out organize and out shout the plan's supporters. The rancor and invective dominating Israel's political scene also reflect Sharon's personal operating style. Long known as the Bulldozer, he has never, with the exception of his role in the creation of the Likud in 1972, built political coalitions to achieve his aims. Nor has he made efforts to defuse or mollify his opponents. Rather, he forges ahead, over, around, and through such obstacles they put in his path, less mindful of defusing centers of opposition than of attaining the objective he has identified. In that sense, the political landscape in Israel today regarding disengagement from Gaza resembles one of Sharon's military battlefields—messy, confused, and dangerous, with signs of progress toward “victory” nonetheless.

On September 14, Israel's security cabinet took a first practical step toward implementing Sharon's plan to “disengage” from the Gaza Strip and evacuate four West Bank settlements by the end of 2005. It approved the creation and funding of a special evacuation authority, the outline of a compensation scheme for individuals and businesses in affected areas, and advance payments to settlers choosing to evacuate before the

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TO OUR READERS

The Bush Administration has retreated from engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Democratic challenger John Kerry has not offered an alternative.

While predictable in an election year, this default increases the risks this bitter and unresolved conflict poses to U.S. national security.

Over the past decade, American diplomacy has been cautious, assuming, mistakenly, that Israelis and Palestinians are equal partners, and that “process” alone can bring peace. Except for a short-lived initiative by President Clinton, we have avoided clear American positions on core issues of settlements, borders and Jerusalem, and we have tended to defer to Israel. As reasons for avoiding more assertive diplomacy, our leaders have said that “the situation is not ripe for solution,” or that “we cannot want peace more than the parties.” The current explanation, borrowed from Ariel Sharon, is “there can be no Palestinian partner for

peace until Yasser Arafat steps down.” The failure of this approach is now obvious, and the next Administration, Republican or Democratic, must change course.

The costs of continuing American passivity are high. For Israel, it encourages Sharon’s agenda of settlement and domination of the West Bank that, if unchecked, will defeat the goal of two states at peace. Without a viable Palestinian state, Israel faces a grim future as an undemocratic oppressor state, without peace or security and at odds with the world. For Palestinians, it means further injustice and suffering as a subject people. For the U.S, failure to act undermines our war against terrorism and our search for support in Iraq. No less, it betrays our own ideals and our friends in Israel and Palestine who look to us for leadership.



Non-Aligned Movement Foreign Ministers Support Sanctions Against Settlers

“The Ministers took note of the immediate negative response by Israel to the Advisory Opinion [issued by the International Court of Justice at The Hague] and its defiant declarations to continue constructing the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. The Ministers thus called for the following specific actions:

“With regard to Member States, the Ministers called upon them to undertake measures, including by means of legislation, collectively, regionally and individually, to prevent any products of the illegal Israeli settlements from entering their markets consistent with the obligations under International Treaties, to decline entry to Israeli settlers and to impose sanctions against companies and entities involved in the construction of the wall and other illegal activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

“With regard to the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Ministers called for them to adhere to Article 1 common to the four Geneva Conventions and to undertake measures to ensure compliance by Israel with the Convention. They reaffirmed in this regard the obligations of the High Contracting Parties regarding penal sanctions, grave breaches and responsibilities of the High Contracting Parties. The Ministers also called on Switzerland to expedite its consultations, including with regard to reconvening the Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention.”

Excerpted from the Declaration on Palestine,
14th Ministerial Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement, August 19, 2004

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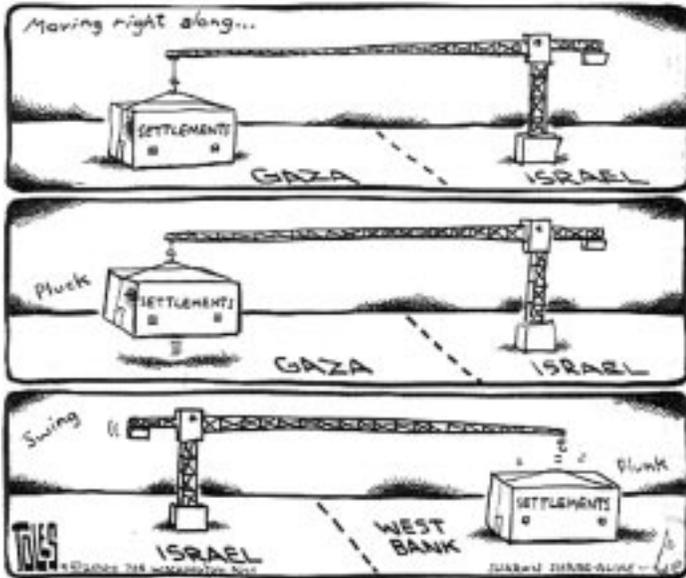
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SETTLEMENT SNAPSHOTS

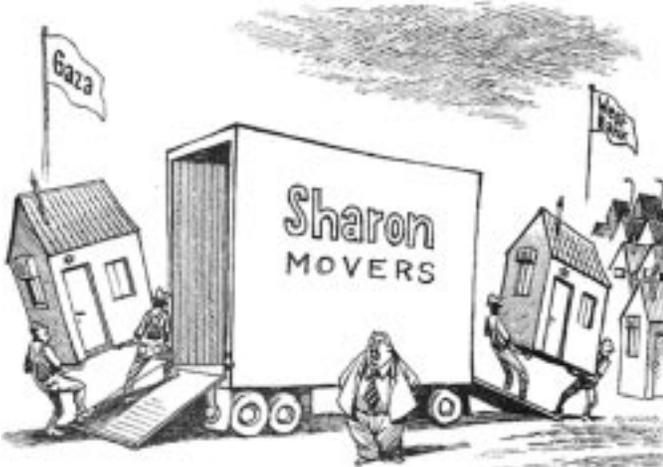


The Washington Post Tom Toles TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2004



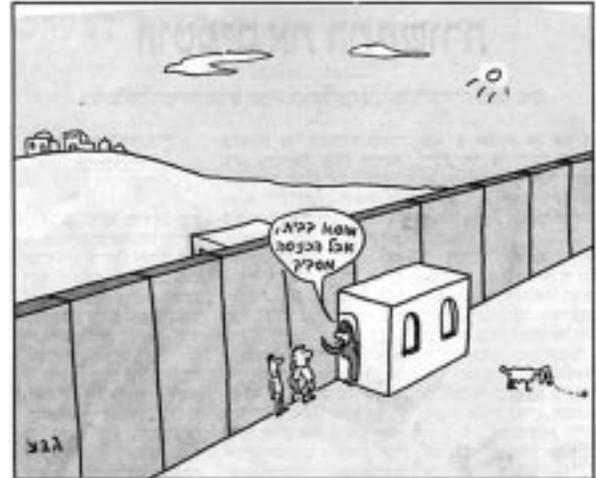
Ha'aretz August 23, 2004

Biderman



International Herald Tribune, August 20, 2004

Cantone



"Mousa is home, but the entrance is on the other side."

Ha'aretz, August 6, 2004



Ma'aniv, August 9, 2004



Ha'aretz, September 7, 2004

SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

May 3 A Likud Party referendum tallies 59.5% opposed to unilateral withdrawal from Gaza with 39.7% in favor. Approximately half of the party's registered members voted, or almost 100,000 people. (Arutz 7)

Israel's High Court issues an order effectively stopping construction of a 60 km portion of the separation barrier between the West Bank settlement of Elkana and Jerusalem in response to petitions arguing for changes in the barrier's intended route.

A cornerstone is laid at the site of a new development of 12 houses in the Gaza Strip settlement of Neve Dekalim. Additional housing construction is planned for Alei Sinai (38 units), Morag (10), and Nisanit (48). (*Ha'aretz*)

May 4 In Gaza, the IDF begins construction of a 7 km barrier along the length of the Kissufim corridor, where a settler and her four children were killed May 2. (*Ha'aretz*)

May 5 The IDF issues orders for the demolition of 11 homes in the Old City of Hebron and for the confiscation of lands near the Ibrahimi Mosque. According to the Land Defense Committees, the IDF is attempting to clear land surrounding the settlement of Kiryat Arba. (*Al-Quds*)

May 6 Arutz 7 reports expanding Jewish development around the area of Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem. The Uvneh Yerushalayim organization reports the conversion of two stores into a visitors' center and the intention of two families to move into apartments within a few weeks. A yeshiva and study hall have already been completed.

Israel's Housing Ministry spent more than \$6 million on construction in West Bank outposts at a time when other branches of the government were curtailing construction and demolishing some facilities. Israel's comptroller reported that between June 2000 and June 2003 the ministry signed 77 contracts worth approximately \$6.6 million for work at 33 locations in the West Bank where construction is illegal. In addition, \$4.1 million went to projects at 18 locations that were not within the boundaries of existing settlements. (*Washington Post*)

May 8 President George W. Bush, in an *al-Abram* interview, states "I think the [road map's] timetable of [Palestinian statehood in] 2005 isn't as realistic a goal as it was two years ago. Nevertheless, I do think we ought

to push hard as fast as possible to get a state in place."

May 9 Arutz 7 reports Israeli deputy defense minister Ze'ev Boim noting that four mainly unpopulated outposts have been removed in the preceding months.

Minister of Defense Shaul Mofaz declares that, "The communities that were established in the Gaza Strip are a historic mistake. They are not in the map of the interests of the State of Israel." (*Ma'ariv*)

May 10 The IDF demolishes 13 homes in Gaza near the Kissufim route into the Katif bloc, leaving 75 Palestinians homeless. (AP)

Peace Now reports that one new outpost has been built and that existing West Bank outposts were reinforced in the first four months of 2004. The report notes that there are 100 outposts. (*Ha'aretz*)

May 12 According to UNRWA, more than 100 Palestinian homes have been destroyed and 1,100 people left homeless by a 10-day IDF incursion into Gaza. Most of the demolitions occurred in Rafah, where 11,215 people have been made homeless by demolitions since September 2000.

May 15 B'Tselem reports that since January 2004 the IDF has demolished 284 homes in Rafah, leaving 2,185 Palestinians homeless.

May 17 Israel deploys 100 tanks from Israeli settlements near Rafah to cut it off from Khan Yunis. (UNRWA)

May 18 Arutz 7 reports that after a violent six-hour demolition of the Mitzpeh Yitzhar outpost, supporters and residents returned to the site and began rebuilding the structures.

The IDF launches Operation Seek and Destroy in the Tal Sultan neighborhood of Rafah, leaving 20 Palestinians dead and 35 wounded. (Arutz 7)

Amnesty International releases a statement noting that the house demolitions under way in Gaza are "grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention and are war crimes." Amnesty official Donatella Rovera says, "In the vast majority of cases, it's wanton destruction." (Associated Press)

May 19 The IDF welds shut the doors of the Aqtab mosque in Hebron more than a month after ordering the cessation of the call to prayer from the mosque while settlers

are at prayer. (*Palestine Report*)

The UN Security Council passes a resolution criticizing the Israeli operation in Rafah with 14 in favor, none against, and one abstention, by the United States.

May 21 UN undersecretary general for political affairs Kiran Pendergast tells members of the Security Council that Israeli demolitions in Gaza are a violation of international law. UN agencies estimate that \$32 million will be needed to rebuild Palestinian homes.

Yerushalim reports that during the first five months of 2004, the Jerusalem municipality demolished 41 structures built without permits, 36 of them in Palestinian East Jerusalem. During 2003, there were 76 demolitions, 66 of them in Palestinian neighborhoods. In 2000, 15 structures were demolished, 38 in 2001 and 49 in 2002.

May 24 UNRWA reports that from May 18 to May 24 a total of 167 buildings were destroyed in the Tal Sultan, Brazil, and Salam areas of Rafah, leaving 379 families homeless. An additional 110 buildings were destroyed between May 1 and May 18, leaving 262 families without homes. Since the beginning of the al-Aqsa intifada, 1,476 buildings have been demolished, affecting 14,666 in Rafah.

IDF Gaza division commander Gen. Shmuel Zakai announces the killing of 41 Palestinians and the demolition of 56 Palestinian homes during Operation Rainbow in Rafah. (*Ha'aretz*)

May 25 According to UNRWA statistics, Israeli troops demolished more than 155 Palestinian homes in the past month, during operations in Rafah.

A survey by B'Tselem reveals that 45 Palestinians were killed and 67 homes were destroyed in eight days during Operation Rainbow. The tally is in addition to 116 homes that were destroyed in the middle of May after five Israeli soldiers were killed.

May 28 *Kol Ha'Ir* reports the recent publication of land tenders for 682 dwelling units in Har Homa.

June 6 The Israeli cabinet endorses Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's revised disengagement plan in a 14-7 vote. Sharon announces, "The disengagement process has begun. Today, the government decided that it is

SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

Israel's intention to relocate all Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip and four settlements in Samaria by the end of 2005." (Arutz 7)

June 7 *Ha'aretz* publishes a tender for the construction of six dwelling units in the Mitzpe Nevo section of Ma'ale Adumim.

June 8 Arutz 7 reports that Israeli Trade Minister Ehud Olmert has ordered the permanent closure of the Erez Industrial Zone in northern Gaza. There are 170 factories, including 60 under Palestinian Arab ownership, employing 4,500 Palestinians and 570 Israelis. Since the beginning of 2004, the area has been closed 70 work days because of security concerns.

June 9 *Ha'aretz* reports violent clashes between settlers from Yitzhar and villagers from al-Zawiya, after the theft of some sheep from a local Palestinian shepherd. Five settlers are arrested after attempting to attack the Palestinian and retreat to the settlement.

Three Palestinians are injured during a demonstration against the separation barrier in al-Zawiya. (*Ha'aretz*)

June 10 A survey conducted by the Jerusalem municipality suggests that there will be an Arab majority in Jerusalem by 2040. Because of the construction of the separation barrier, each week more than 300 Palestinians holding Jerusalem identity documents but living in the West Bank are returning to live in the city. (*Yediot Aharanot*)

Israeli police report a dramatic increase in settler attacks on Palestinians, particularly in the northern West Bank and Hebron. Since the beginning of the year, files opened against settlers as a consequence of Palestinian complaints have risen by 15 percent over a comparable period in 2003. Most cases concern the theft or destruction of property. (*Ha'aretz*)

June 14 Israel begins construction of the separation barrier in the Ariel-Keddumim-Emmanuel-Shave Shomron "finger" areas which jut into the West Bank from the Green Line. It is reported that land expropriation orders for a corridor 3.5 km long and 100 m wide have been sent to Palestinian owners of land south of Ariel designated for construction of the barrier. (*Mideast Mirror*)

Zacharia Zubeidi, commander of the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade in Jenin, announces his intention to halt attacks if the Israel Defense Forces withdraw from the West Bank city and settlements in the area. (*Ha'aretz*)

Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz decides to include Givat Eitam, north of Efrat, within the separation barrier. (*Ha'aretz*)

June 15 Mofaz and Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu authorize a new budget of almost \$70 million to fortify settlements outside the separation barrier. The budget is separate from the defense budget and is earmarked for building fences around isolated settlements. (*Ha'aretz*)

A fourth Jewish family moves into Kiryat Ne'emana, located opposite Jerusalem's Damascus Gate. (Arutz 7)

June 16 An Israeli military spokesperson tells BBC News that "the security fence around Ariel is being built in accordance with the understandings with the U.S. government."

June 18 It is reported that the Israeli Defense Ministry is seeking bids for the construction of a 4 km long and 16 m deep moat to be built in the Philadelphi corridor between Egypt and Gaza. According to Deputy Defense Minister Ze'ev Boim, the tender was issued to determine the cost and feasibility of the project. (*Mideast Mirror*)

For the third time in eighteen months, a tender for the construction of 48 dwelling units in Pisgat Ze'ev East, opposite the Palestinian village of Hizma, fails to solicit any bids. Contractors blame the site's proximity to Hizma for the lack of interest. (*Kol Ha'ir*)

June 21 A mortar kills a Thai worker in the settlement of Kfar Darom in the Gaza Strip. Palestinians attempt to infiltrate the settlement, but are foiled by the IDF. Three months prior, the Thai embassy had instructed all its citizens to evacuate the Katif bloc, but many stayed. (*Ha'aretz*)

June 22 The IDF razes three buildings near Kfar Darom, claiming that they were used to provide cover for Palestinian gunmen. (Arutz 7)

Ha'aretz publishes a tender for the construction of 32 dwelling units in the Barta quarter

of the Golan settlement of Katzrin.

June 23 The YESHA Rabbis Council declares that "no citizen, policeman or soldier is authorized to assist in the dismantling of [settlement] communities." (*Yediot Aharanot*)

June 24 A report by the United Nations Relief and Work Agency and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs notes that 1,497 dwellings in Rafah have been destroyed by the IDF during the al-Aqsa intifada, leaving 15,009 homeless.

June 25 The Palestinian Authority agrees to provide UNRWA with land on which to build 400 new shelters for Palestinians made homeless by Israeli military operations in Rafah. (UNRWA)

Breaking a verbal agreement with villagers, the Jerusalem municipality destroys a new cemetery constructed by residents of Jabal Mukabber after access to their traditional site was impeded by construction of the separation barrier. (*Kol Ha'ir*)

June 27 Abraham Shapira, a former chief rabbi of Israel and current head of the Rabbis Union for the Land of Israel, writes, "Any thought, idea, decision or action of any kind to remove residents of the Katif bloc and to hand the area to foreigners [Palestinians], is against Jewish law, and all means must be used to prevent this." (*Ha'aretz*)

June 29 The rabbi of the Old City states at a rabbinical conference held in the West Bank outpost of Givat HaRoeh that "anyone who hands over part of the Land of Israel to foreigners is judged as a *din rodef*," a term in Jewish law permitting a Jew to kill another Jew if the latter's actions endanger the lives of other Jews. At the same conference Rabbi Dov Lior, head of the YESHA Rabbis Council noted that if the IDF is given orders "that contradict the way of the Torah, such as the dismantling of communities in the Land of Israel and their transfer to strangers, neither the king nor the Knesset and not even the High Court of Justice, which aspires to be the most holy, can decide otherwise. Secular Zionism has reached the end of its road, and the settlers are the Hasmonians of our time, who walk the path of truth, even if they are a minority." (*Ha'aretz*)

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION: FOR AND AGAINST SETTLEMENT EXPANSION

On August 17, State Department deputy spokesman Adam Ereli was asked if the U.S. considered Israeli plans for additional housing in Israeli settlements in the occupied territories to be inconsistent with Israeli pledges to freeze settlements.

Israel has been expanding its settlements for almost four decades. To the extent the U.S. has opposed this effort, it has been singularly unsuccessful. There are now almost one half million Israelis living on territories conquered in June 1967. It would seem self-evident that continuing expansion in the context of an Israeli commitment to the U.S. not to would call for U.S. censure. Instead journalists were treated to a tortured, if informative and revealing, example of the Bush administration's attempts to downplay the Sharon government's failure to uphold its commitments to the president.

Question: The Israeli Government invited construction bids for 1,000 new homes in the West Bank. An Israeli official said that it's within the guidelines of the government and the agreements with the Americans. What's your comment on that?

Mr. Ereli: Our comment is that we are studying the details regarding the tenders that have been issued by the Government of Israel. Our concern is to determine whether these tenders are consistent with the Government of Israel's previous commitments on settlements.

Question: Adam, it seems pretty clear this is not consistent with the Government of Israel's previous statements. There seems to be a fairly obvious case to be made that this is a violation of their roadmap commitments. Why is it that you can't say that?

Mr. Ereli: Because I'm not in a position now to say that any specific action is a violation of commitments. I'm just not—we're not there yet.

Question: Well, hold on. The commitment—well, the roadmap says, "freeze all settlement activities." Okay? And that is what it says, right?

Mr. Ereli: Freeze settlement activity, including natural growth.

Question: Okay. This is a tender for 1,000 new houses in the West Bank. It seems absurd that that's not a violation, or that there is anything to study here.

Mr. Ereli: Right. I would say we've got to look at where these tenders are, what previous discussions were, what these tenders are for, what specific commitments were made, and then based on those discussions, I would perhaps be more comfortable telling you more.

Question: Adam, I'm sorry, that just—that does not fly. The commitment that the Israelis made was "freeze all settlement activity." So isn't this—this is not freezing all settlement activity; in fact, this is the exact opposite of that.

Mr. Ereli: Yeah, I can't go further than that, Matt. I'm sorry.

Question: Adam, you're saying you're studying where these

new homes would be. Why would that make any difference that the roadmap says there cannot be in the occupied areas new settlement activity?

Mr. Ereli: Yeah. Well, let me just leave it where I left it. What I told you is, frankly, what I'm comfortable saying and I don't want to, really, from the podium, at this time, to get into a discussion with you of the specifics of these tenders because, frankly, I don't have the exact specifics of the tenders; and pronounce to you, at this time, whether or not we think it is a violation of commitments.

What I would say to you is: (a) we've made clear to Israel what we think it's committed to; (b) our view is there should be in no doubt about what our views are; (c) that we continue to have discussions with the Government of Israel on this issue; and finally, at this point, I'm not going to tell you that these tenders do or do not violate those commitments.

Question: How would it be possible to build these houses and not be in violation?

Mr. Ereli: No. I cannot do that.

Question: Don't you think it's a bit unrealistic to say that the Israeli Government should be—have no doubt about what your position is on their commitments when you're unable to say right now that this is inconsistent with their commitments? If you're trying to parse the phrase in the roadmap that says "no new settlement activity," or, "a halt to settlement activity," you can't do that. It's black and white. It says it right there.

Mr. Ereli: Yeah.

Question: I realize—I appreciate that you're on a—kind of a tight rein on what you can say and what you can't say here, and you don't want to go beyond it, but it needs to be pointed out, I think, for the record, that you guys are very wishy-washy on this right now.

Mr. Ereli: I would point out a couple things. Number one, not everything we say to the Israelis is on the record. So we have discussions with the Israelis. As I said, we've had discussions most recently with our ambassador and the senior National Security Council officials about our concerns in this area. We continue to have discussions with the Israelis about our concerns in this area.

Obviously, this issue—these tenders, as well as previous tenders at Ma'ale Adumim, are subjects of those discussions and we've been very clear with the Israelis about what our views and what our understandings are.

Now, just because I'm not going to—I'm not in a position to speak to those from the podium right now doesn't mean that it's not something we've talked to the Israelis about.

Question: Well, when you say that not all your conversations with the Israelis are on the record, are you suggesting—because it sure sounds like it—that in a closed-door meeting someone is saying, "Okay, well, we realize that you

EXPANSION, continued on page 7

expected passage of enabling legislation by the Knesset later this year.

Sharon may be winning the war, as the machine to implement evacuation plods forward. But the failure of his erstwhile supporters in the international community to assure that a disengagement produces a demonstrable end to Israel's occupation threatens to undermine the strategic intent of the plan itself.

Sharon has decided to reverse two basic principles of Israeli rule in the Gaza Strip—the requirement that the IDF deploy throughout the occupied territories and the associated campaign to consolidate its presence through civilian settlement. He aspires to change the paradigm of Israeli control over Gaza, invite Jordanian and Egyptian participation in the management of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, respectively, and consolidate direct Israeli rule over areas of the West Bank marked for annexation, outlined in part by the separation barrier now being constructed.

Disengagement marks an important turning point in the history of Israeli occupation policy. Most significant, the Gaza Strip has joined the Sinai as an arena where Israel is prepared to endorse evacuation of settlements and military withdrawal as a means of *enhancing* Israeli security.

The central elements of the new paradigm that Sharon wants to establish, at least in Gaza—withdrawal, end to occupation, a political defeat for Israel's settlement movement—offer a better foundation for the exercise of Palestinian sovereignty than the Oslo parameters, which were characterized by redeployment, continuing occupation, and unprecedented settlement expansion. While Palestinians will not acquiesce in Sharon's plans for the West Bank and East Jerusalem, all parties support a retreat from Gaza.

Yet if disengagement is to succeed, the occupation of Gaza must end. The disengagement plan as currently structured will not satisfy this standard—one that the Sharon government itself has established and the international community supports.

An Israeli "evacuation lite" does not accommodate basic elements of Palestinian sovereignty—safe passage, air and sea ports, and an Israeli withdrawal from the "Philadelphi" border strip. It risks perpetuating a situation in the occupied territories of extraordinary levels of international aid without development, undermines any possibility for the establishment of effective Palestinian governing institutions supported by the Palestinian public, and assures continuing violent confrontation in Gaza.

The international community must do more to insure that disengagement results in an end to Israel's occupation and the creation of conditions for the exercise of Palestinian sovereignty. Failure to do so risks being complicit in a post-disengagement Israeli strategy of "occupation lite" for Gaza that exacerbates the despair and suffering of its captive Palestinian population. Inaction also contributes to the failure of an

idea—the end to the occupation of Gaza—whose value is recognized and supported for the first time by Israel's political and security establishment, and which would serve, despite Sharon's protests, as a precedent for an Israeli withdrawal in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. ♦

EXPANSION, *continued from page 6*

signed up for this halt on all settlement activity, but—wink, wink, nudge, nudge—you can add a few here and there and we won't say anything"?

Mr. Erel: No, I don't mean to suggest that at all.

Question: Well, it certainly sounds like it.

Question: Given that, to most people, there isn't a gray area here and this is—this does contradict the formal agreement you have, can you explain what understandings the Housing—the Israeli housing minister thinks he has with Washington that he thinks that—he said publicly this new settlement activity adheres to understandings he has with Washington?

Mr. Erel: No, I can't speak for the Israeli housing minister.

Question: Well, perhaps you can speak for the United States. What understandings do you have with Israel regarding this? It sounds precisely what I just said, that behind the scenes you guys are saying, "Well, you know, we're not really going to hold you to it."

Mr. Erel: No. We are, I think, very clear both publicly and with the Israelis —

Question: Well, not today you're not.

Mr. Erel: Let me be clear, if there's any misunderstanding or lack of clarity. We are clear with the public and with the Israelis that they have made a commitment to freeze settlement activity, including natural growth, and that is the position—that is the commitment they have made, that is what we are working with the Israelis to follow through on, both publicly and privately.

Question: Well, if that's the case, then how can you not see this as just a giant slap in the face from Sharon?

Mr. Erel: That's as much as I can do for you. I'm sorry.

Question: Adam, how much money does the United States give Israel every year? It's 3—it's a little over \$3 billion. You're saying that you have zero influence now?

Mr. Erel: No, I'm not saying we have zero influence. I'm saying that we are working with the Israelis to see that they fulfill their commitments that they've made.

Question: Well, that would mean, then, does not that necessarily mean that you're telling them, "Stop, take back these tender offers"?

Mr. Erel: I'm not going to get into the details of what we're discussing. ♦

WHO NEEDS A SETTLEMENT FREEZE?

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is presiding over a wide-ranging program of settlement expansion in most areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as ground is broken on the thousands of units approved by Sharon and his immediate predecessor Ehud Barak. This program belies claims by government officials that settlement expansion is confined to areas within Israel's national "consensus," such as Ma'ale Adumim and the Etzion bloc, or that the Sharon government is focusing its settlement efforts in those "settlement blocs" said to be included in U.S. president George W. Bush's April 2004 declaration acknowledging the eventual annexation of some settlements to Israel.

Details of ongoing settlement expansion have been reported by the Israeli organization Peace Now, which in recent months has begun comparing on a regular basis aerial imagery for every settlement. This data enables a detailed review of the type and extent of settlement activity being undertaken in each settlement.

Based upon an aerial survey in June, settlement expansion activity is under way at 73 of 211 locations, including 12 of

Gaza's 21 settlements. The total area involved in this expansion is close to 500,000 square meters and includes new and continuing land development for settlement, new infrastructure, new and continuing construction, internal road works, and the placement of new caravans. ♦

Settlement Expansion, March-June 2004

<u>Settlement/Council</u>	<u>Expansion (m²)</u>
Mount Hebron	1,861
Ariel	2,841
Jordan Valley	9,935
Betar Ilit	11,211
Alfe Menashe	15,325
Ma'ale Adumim	20,738
Etzion Bloc	33,990
Benjamin	64,413
Shomron	138,182
Gaza Strip	191,302
Total (m ²)	489,798

Source: Peace Now.

Question: So are you against what the Israelis call "natural growth" in settlements?

Deputy Secretary Armitage: It depends on what the definition of "natural growth" is. There are some questions that will be raised when settlements are settled to the tune of 30 percent to 35 percent. It doesn't seem reasonable to have those that expand. But there has to be a definition of natural growth before I can answer your question.

Question: So you are not really unequivocal on this?

Deputy Secretary Armitage: Well, I'm being equivocal because I'd like to see the definition to which all people can agree of natural growth, and then I can answer your question. But since I haven't seen that, I can't answer your question.

Question: But Israel, actually, is using this to expand settlements in the area.

Deputy Secretary Armitage: Now, we have spoken to our Israeli friends about this, and our view is, as the President put forth, all settlement activity must stop.

Question: Okay. But when you say "all," this should include natural growth.

Deputy Secretary Armitage: Well, I say, what is the definition of "natural growth"? If you have settlements that already exist and you put more people into them but don't expand the physical, sort of, area, that might be one thing. But if the physical area expands and encroaches, and it takes more of Palestinian land, well, this is another. So to say that, it depends on the definition of natural growth.

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard L. Armitage, interview on Egyptian Television, September 10, 2004

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