

REPORT ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENT IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

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ISRAEL'S POLICY OF "CREATING FACTS" WINS OVER THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION

The quest of Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon for a diplomatic framework to modify, if not to end, Israel's continuing rule over the occupied territories has moved into high gear. The publication of Sharon's draft disengagement plan in April, accompanied by an exchange of letters between the Israeli leader and U.S. president George W. Bush has refocused international attention on a new approach to address Israel's continuing occupation and the Palestinian rebellion that is now well into its third year.

Sharon has made an unprecedented decision to end Israel's military and civilian occupation of the Gaza Strip, and to evacuate four West Bank settlements.

"There is no one more familiar with the Gaza Strip than I am," Sharon told members of his Likud faction. "I have traveled its length not in a car but by

foot. Over the long term I don't see that Jews can live there. All of us would like that we could be in all parts of the Land of Israel, including myself. But all those who fool themselves that under current political conditions, someone in the world, including the United States, will support such a policy is dreaming, incorrect, and mistaken."

Sharon has mobilized a large majority of the Israeli public as well as elite political and military opinion in support of the option. Indeed, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz has declared that civilian Israeli settlement in the Gaza Strip was a "historic mistake." Notwithstanding the surprising repudiation of the Sharon plan by members of his own party, Sharon's idea marks an important turning point in the history of Israeli occupation policy, and it will not be undone by the results of the Likud referendum.

The Sharon plan aims at managing rather than solving Israel's occupation of lands captured in June 1967. Israel's decision to proceed unilaterally returns diplomacy to a pre-Madrid era and represents a diplomatic coup against the Bush administration, which has been weakened by the unfolding debacle in Iraq and faces a difficult election in November. Confronted with Sharon's plan, which for the first time promises an evacuation of settlements, the White House in effect jettisoned its own "road map" as the centerpiece of Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy.

"Although the road map is an American plan," explained Yuval Steinitz, the

chair of the powerful Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, "the president agreed to endorse another plan which is inconsistent with the road map."

The international community has followed the American lead. Terje Roed-Larsen, UN special coordinator for the peace process, noted in an April 23 meeting of the Security Council that "no Israeli prime minister has previously had the boldness and the vision to say that he will remove settlers—as long called for by the international community—and initiate a plan for its implementation."

Yet the international community remains wary of the limited, unilateral nature of Israel's intentions. Chris Patten, commissioner of the European Union, writing in the *Jordan Times* on April 26, noted, "It is not surprising that we have agreed with what has been for 37 years the consistent American position that settlements beyond the '67 line are illegal and represent 'obstacles to peace.' We all know what will be the ingredients for a final settlement. They are there in the Mitchell Report and subsequent documents, including the Arab League peace initiative of 2002. They are there in the roadmap which has been endorsed by the international community. A settlement does not await some heavenly insight. . . ."

"As the European Council has said again and again, a final settlement can

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TO OUR READERS

The Bush administration's enthusiastic support for Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan, which the president described as "historic and courageous," seems at best naive.

Perhaps the administration believes that Israel's unilateral withdrawal from settlements in Gaza could trigger, whatever Sharon's true intent, the eventual collapse of the entire settlement movement and therefore should be welcomed. Control of the West Bank has, however, always been Sharon's strategic goal. He promises to remove only four small West Bank settlements, containing fewer than 1,000 settlers, leaving dozens of other settlements and more than 220,000 settlers under Israeli control. Is Sharon playing salami tactics with the settlers or is his plan a smoke-screen—sacrificing the settlements in Gaza while consolidating Israel's hold on the West Bank? It is almost certainly the latter.

Even if Sharon contemplates evacuating additional West Bank settlements, the massive separation barrier is the most tangible test of his goals. Its route in the west and Sharon's plans to retain the Jordan Valley in the east, with or without a barrier there, will prevent the creation of the "contiguous" and "viable" Palestinian state that President George W. Bush supports.

Israelis hope that Sharon's Gaza withdrawal and the separation barrier will increase security. Absent a negotiated departure by the Israeli army, Gaza could continue to breed violence. Without a return to comprehensive negotiations and hope for peace, West Bank militants, viewing Israel's withdrawal from Gaza under fire, will continue the rebellion there.



Settlements in the Evacuation Mix

The Gaza Strip has a complement of 20 Israeli settlements located in three main areas: in the northwest corner bordering Israel Nisanit, Dugit, and Alei Sinai; in a north-south trajectory controlling the main Gaza route—Salah al-Din Street—the isolated settlements of Netzarim, Kfar Darom, and Morag that enable the division of the strip into three sections. ranged; and settlements situated along the coast in the Katif bloc north of Rafah that serve as a physical barrier to the creation of Palestinian contiguity between Gaza City and Rafah.

Settlement planning areas comprise 54 square kilometers, of which 11.7 sq.km represents built-up area. This infrastructure supports a population of approximately 7,000 Israelis residing in 1,500 dwelling units, representing a density of 665 people per sq.km.. A well developed, privately owned but state subsidized agricultural infrastructure produces for Israeli and export markets. There is also an industrial production base centered at Erez in the northwest bloc of settlements.

The entire Gaza Strip covers 365 sq.km., of which 55 sq.km. is Palestinian built-up area. The population density among Palestinians is 25,400 people per sq.km., rising to 50,478 per sq.km. in the refugee camps.

The disengagement plan concerns only four West Bank settlements concentrated in the Jenin region: Ganim (population 170), Kadim (149), Sa Nur (33), and Homesh (198).

The existence and protection of these settlements has resulted in the balkanization of Palestinian territory in the northern part of the West Bank and the interruption of normal transport, commerce, and many features of daily Palestinian life. Their evacuation does not represent the kind of conceptual and strategic thinking governing Israel's contemplated withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. The evacuation of these four settlements will have salutary effects on a local and perhaps regional level, but it will hardly represent a basis for sovereign, Palestinian control in the West Bank.

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BUSH LETTER TO SHARON RECOGNIZES “FACTS ON THE GROUND”

April 14, 2004

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

Thank you for your letter setting out your disengagement plan.

The United States remains hopeful and determined to find a way forward toward a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. I remain committed to my June 24, 2002 vision of two states living side by side in peace and security as the key to peace, and to the roadmap as the route to get there.

We welcome the disengagement plan you have prepared, under which Israel would withdraw certain military installations and all settlements from Gaza, and withdraw certain military installations and settlements in the West Bank. These steps described in the plan will mark real progress toward realizing my June 24, 2002 vision, and make a real contribution towards peace. We also understand that, in this context, Israel believes it is important to bring new opportunities to the Negev and the Galilee. We are hopeful that steps pursuant to this plan, consistent with my vision, will remind all states and parties of their own obligations under the roadmap.

The United States appreciates the risks such an undertaking represents. I therefore want to reassure you on several points. First, the United States remains committed to my vision and to its implementation as described in the roadmap. The United States will do its utmost to prevent any attempt by anyone to impose any other plan. Under the roadmap, Palestinians must undertake an immediate cessation of armed activity and all acts of violence against Israelis anywhere, and all official Palestinian institutions must end incitement against Israel. The Palestinian leadership must act decisively against terror, including sustained, targeted, and effective operations to stop terrorism and dismantle terrorist capabilities and infrastructure. Palestinians must undertake a comprehensive and fundamental political reform that includes a strong parliamentary democracy and an empowered prime minister.

Second, there will be no security for Israelis or Palestinians until they and all states, in the region and beyond, join together to fight terrorism and dismantle terrorist organizations. . . . The United States reiterates its steadfast commitment to Israel's security, including secure, defensible borders, and to preserve and strengthen Israel's capability to deter and defend itself, by itself, against any threat or possible combination of threats.

Third, Israel will retain its right to defend itself against terrorism, including to take actions against terrorist organizations. . . . The United States understands that after Israel withdraws from Gaza and/or parts of the West Bank, and pending agreements on other arrangements, existing arrangements regarding control of airspace, territorial waters, and land passages of the West Bank and Gaza will continue.

The United States is strongly committed to Israel's security and well-being as a Jewish state. It seems clear that an agreed, just, fair, and realistic framework for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue as part of any final status agreement will need to be found through the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the settling of Palestinian refugees there, rather than in Israel.

As part of a final peace settlement, Israel must have secure and recognized borders, which should emerge from negotiations between the parties in accordance with UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338. In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli populations centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949, and all previous efforts to negotiate a two-state solution have reached the same conclusion. It is realistic to expect that any final status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities.

I know that, as you state in your letter, you are aware that certain responsibilities face the State of Israel. Among these, your government has stated that the barrier being erected by Israel should be a security rather than political barrier, should be temporary rather than permanent, and therefore not prejudice any final status issues including final borders, and its route should take into account, consistent with security needs, its impact on Palestinians not engaged in terrorist activities. As you know, the United States supports the establishment of a Palestinian state that is viable, contiguous, sovereign, and independent, so that the Palestinian people can build their own future in accordance with my vision set forth in June 2002 and with the path set forth in the roadmap. . . .

A peace settlement negotiated between Israelis and Palestinians would be a great boon not only to those peoples but to the peoples of the entire region. Accordingly, the United States believes that all states in the region have special responsibilities: to support the building of the institutions of a Palestinian state; to fight terrorism, and cut off all forms of assistance to individuals and groups engaged in terrorism; and to begin now to move toward more normal relations with the State of Israel. These actions would be true contributions to building peace in the region.

Mr. Prime Minister, you have described a bold and historic initiative that can make an important contribution to peace. I commend your efforts and your courageous decision which I support. As a close friend and ally, the United States intends to work closely with you to help make it a success.

Sincerely,
George W. Bush

THE DISENGAGEMENT PLAN

The following is the text of the disengagement plan presented by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to U.S. President George W. Bush, as it appeared on April 16, 2004 in the Israeli press.

I. Overview

Israel is committed to the peace process, and aspires to reach a mutual agreement on the basis of two states for two peoples, the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people and a Palestinian state for the Palestinian people, as part of the realization of President [George W.] Bush's vision.

Israel believes that it must act to improve the current reality. Israel has come to the conclusion that at present, there is no Palestinian partner with whom it is possible to make progress on a bilateral agreement. In light of this, a unilateral disengagement plan has been formulated, which is based on the following considerations:

A. The stagnation inherent in the current situation is harmful. In order to emerge from this stagnation, Israel must initiate a move that will not be contingent on Palestinian cooperation.

B. The plan will lead to a better security reality, at least in the long term.

C. In any future final-status agreement, there will be no Israeli settlement in the Gaza Strip. However, it is clear that in Judea and Samaria, some areas will remain part of the state of Israel, among them civilian settlements, military zones and places where Israel has additional interests.

D. The exit from the Gaza Strip and from the area of northern Samaria (four settlements and military installations in their environs) will reduce friction with the Palestinian population and has the potential to improve the fabric of Palestinian life and the Palestinian economy.

E. Israel hopes that the Palestinians will have the sense to take advantage of the disengagement move in order to exit the cycle of violence and rejoin the process of dialogue.

F. The disengagement move will obviate the claims about Israel with regard to its responsibility for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

G. The disengagement move does not detract from the existing agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. The existing arrangements will continue to prevail.

When there is evidence on the Palestinian side of the willingness, ability and actual realization of a fight against terror and of the implementation of the reforms stipulated in the road map, it will be possible to return to the track of negotiations and dialogue.

II. Main points of the plan

A. The Gaza Strip

1. Israel will evacuate the Gaza Strip, including all the Israeli settlements currently existing there, and will redeploy outside the territory of the Strip. This, apart from military deployment along the border line between the Gaza Strip and Egypt ('Philadelphi Route'), will be detailed below.

2. Upon completion of the move, no permanent Israeli civilian or military presence in the areas that are evacuated in the continental expanse of the Gaza Strip will remain.

As a result, there will be no basis for the claim that the Gaza Strip is occupied territory.

B. Judea and Samaria

1. Israel will evacuate the area of northern Samaria (Ganim, Kadim, Homesh and Sa-Nur) and all the permanent military installations in this area, and will redeploy outside the evacuated area.

2. Upon completion of the move, no permanent presence of Israeli military forces and Israeli civilians in the area of northern Samaria will remain.

3. The move will enable Palestinian territorial contiguity in the area of northern Samaria.

4. Israel will improve the transportation infrastructure in Judea and Samaria with the aim of enabling Palestinian transportation contiguity in Judea and Samaria.

5. The move will make Palestinian economic and commercial activity easier in Judea and Samaria.

C. The security fence

Israel will continue to build the security fence, in accordance with the relevant government decisions. The route will take humanitarian considerations into account.

III: Security reality after the evacuation

A. The Gaza Strip

1. Israel will supervise and guard the external envelope on land, will maintain exclusive control in the air space of Gaza, and will continue to conduct military activities in the sea space of the Gaza Strip.

2. The Gaza Strip will be demilitarized and devoid of armaments, the presence of which is not in accordance with the existing agreements between the sides.

3. Israel reserves for itself the basic right of self-defense, including taking preventative steps as well as responding by using force against threats that will emerge from the Gaza Strip.

B. Judea and Samaria

1. Upon evacuation of the settlements from northern Samaria (Ganim, Kadim, Homesh and Sa-Nur), no permanent military presence will remain in their environs.

2. Israel reserves for itself the basic right of self-defense, including taking of preventative steps as well as responding with force against threats that emerge from this area.

3. In the rest of the Judea and Samaria territories, existing security activity will continue. However, in accordance with the circumstances, Israel will consider reducing its activity in Palestinian cities.

4. Israel will work toward reducing the number of checkpoints in Judea and Samaria as a whole.

IV. Military installations and infrastructures in the Gaza Strip and the northern Samaria area

In general, they will be dismantled and evacuated, except

for those that Israel will decide to leave in place and transfer to a body that will be determined.

V. The nature of military aid to the Palestinians

Israel agrees that, in coordination with it, advice, aid and instruction will be given to Palestinian security forces for the purpose of fighting terror and maintaining public order by American, British, Egyptian, Jordanian or other experts, as will be agreed upon by Israel.

Israel insists that there will be no foreign security presence in the Gaza Strip and/or Judea and Samaria that is not in coordination with Israel and with Israel's agreement.

VI. The border area between the Gaza Strip and Egypt ('Philadelphi Route')

During the first stage, Israel will continue to maintain a military presence along the border line between the Gaza Strip and Egypt ('Philadelphi Route'). This presence is an essential security need, and in certain places, it is possible that there will be a need for the physical enlargement of the area in which the military activity will be carried out.

Later on, the possibility of evacuating this area will be considered. The evacuation of this area will be contingent on, among other things, the security reality and the extent of Egypt's cooperation in the creation of a more reliable arrangement.

If and when conditions emerge for the evacuation of this area, Israel will be prepared to examine the possibility of establishing a sea port and an airport in the Gaza Strip, subject to arrangements that will be determined with Israel.

VII. The Israeli settlements

Israel will aspire to leave standing the real estate assets of the Israeli settlements. (Note: subject to the presence of an international body that will accept proprietorship as noted below.)

The transfer of Israeli economic activities to Palestinian use embodies within it a possibility for the expansion of Palestinian economic activity.

Israel proposes that an international body be established (on the model of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee — AHLC), to be agreed upon by the United States and Israel, which will receive possession from Israel of the settlements that remain and will appraise the value of all the assets.

Israel reserves for itself the right to ask for consideration of the economic value of the assets that will be left in the evacuated area.

VIII. Infrastructures and civilian arrangements

The water, electricity, sewage and communications infrastructures that serve the Palestinians will be left in place.

Israel will aspire to leave in place the water, electricity and sewage infrastructures that serve the Israeli settlements that will be evacuated.

As a rule, Israel will enable the continued supply of electricity, water, gas and fuel to the Palestinians, under the existing arrangements.

The existing arrangements, including the arrangements with regard to water and the electro-magnetic area, will

remain valid.

IX. The activity of the international civilian organizations

Israel views very favorably continued activity of the international humanitarian organizations and those that deal with civil development, which aid the Palestinian population.

Israel will coordinate with the international organizations the arrangements that will make this activity easier.

X. The economic arrangements

In general, the economic arrangements that are currently in effect between Israel and the Palestinians will remain valid.

These arrangements include, among other things:

A. The entry of workers into Israel in accordance with the existing criteria.

B. The movement of goods between the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria, Israel and foreign countries.

C. The monetary regime.

D. The taxation arrangements and the customs envelope.

E. Postal and communications arrangements.

XI. The Erez Industrial Zone

The Erez Industrial Zone, which is located inside the Gaza Strip, employs approximately 4,000 Palestinian workers. The continued activity of the industrial zone is, above all, a definite Palestinian interest.

Israel will consider leaving the industrial zone in its current format under two conditions:

A. The maintenance of appropriate security arrangements.

B. An explicit recognition by the international community that the continued existence of the industrial zone in its current format will not be perceived as a continuation of Israeli control in the area.

Alternatively, the industrial zone will be transferred to the responsibility of an agreed-upon Palestinian or international element.

Israel will examine, together with Egypt, the possibility of establishing a joint industrial zone on the border of the Gaza Strip, Egypt and Israel.

XII. The international crossing points

A. The international crossing point between the Gaza Strip and Egypt:

1. The existing arrangements will remain in force.

2. Israel is interested in transferring the crossing point to the 'border triangle,' about two kilometers south of its current location; this will be done in coordination with the Egyptians. This will allow the expansion of the hours of activity at the crossing point.

B. The international crossing points between Judea and Samaria, and Jordan:

The existing arrangements will remain in force.

XIII. The Erez crossing point

The Erez crossing point will be moved into the territory of the State of Israel according to a timetable that will be determined separately.

SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

December 17 The Palestinian Agriculture Ministry reports that Israel has destroyed 226 wells in Gaza and 10 in the West Bank from September 2001 through the end of August 2003. The losses total \$6,150,000. Also, according to the ministry Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have destroyed more than 16,000 irrigation networks, 849 water pools, and more than 400,000 water lines. (*Palestine Report*)

December 19 Manufacturers in West Bank settlements threaten to fire their Palestinian employees if the European Union imposes customs duties on products made in the settlements. (*Yerushalim*)

December 22 A tender is published in *Yediot Abaranot* for the construction of 68 dwelling units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Ramat Shlomo.

December 24 The *Jerusalem Post* reports that construction of the separation barrier is to be expedited so that the entire southern end, to the Hebron Hills and the settlement of Carmel, will be finished by 2005. The project will employ 15,000 Israelis and Palestinians. Some 40 contractors will be hired through 37 tenders to construct 332 km of the barrier.

Arutz 7 reports a mortar shell hitting the Gaza settlement of Nisanit, injuring two.

The settlement of Neve Dekalim is targeted by mortars, and rockets are directed at an IDF position protecting the settlement of Gadid. No injuries are reported in either attack. (Arutz 7)

Arutz 7 reports that since September 27, 2003, 391 rockets have been launched against Israeli civilian and military targets in Gaza, and a total of 3,719 rockets have been fired throughout Gaza during the al-Aqsa intifada.

The IDF levels 90 dunums of Palestinian land near the settlement of Kfar Darom. (PHRMG)

December 28 *Globes* reports that a recent tender for the construction of 78 dwelling units in Har Homa received 9 bids. The \$2.67 million involved reflects a 20 percent drop in price compared to previous sales. Another tender for 48 units in Pisgat Ze'ev did not receive any bids.

December 30 The Israeli Interior Ministry reports the number of settlers in the West

Bank and Gaza increased during the preceding three years by 16 percent, to 236,381, twice the settler population in 1993 when Israel signed the Oslo Accords. (*New York Times*)

A tender is published in *Yediot Abaranot* for 113 "Build Your Own House" plots in the West Bank settlement of Har Adar.

December 31 Settlers from the Ma'on settlement, near Hebron, begin reestablishing the Havat Ma'on settlement outpost, which was dismantled by the Israeli government three years prior. (*Palestine Report*)

January 1 Saudi Arabia agrees to build 950 housing units in Rafah for Palestinians whose homes have been destroyed by the IDF. (*Jerusalem Post*)

Ha'aretz reports that Israel's agriculture minister Yisrael Katz declared that the Israeli government will double the number of settlers in the Golan from 17,000.

January 2 *Yediot Abaranot* reports that the IDF has redeployed troops from settlements west of the completed sections of the separation barrier and concentrated them in settlements east of the barrier.

January 3 Israeli deputy prime minister Ehud Olmert asserts that there is no plan to expand the Golan settlements. (*Ha'aretz*)

January 4 Approximately 25 mortar shells are fired at the Katif bloc bringing the total of such firing to 3,779 since the beginning of the al-Aqsa intifada. (Arutz 7)

Ha'aretz reports that with the 2005 completion of the separation barrier, 6 percent of the West Bank will be west of the barrier.

January 5 The Israeli High Court rules that the course of the separation barrier in the town of Sur Bahar in Jerusalem must be altered. The barrier would originally have split the town in half. The court's decision calls for the town to remain united on the west side of the barrier. (*Palestine Report*)

January 6 *Ma'ariv* publishes a list of 28 settlements, with a population of 400, that the Israeli defense ministry intends to evacuate. All were established after March 2001.

January 7 *Ha'aretz* reveals that a defense ministry report citing the evacuation of 66 settlement outposts since March 2001 includes 3 that are to still be evacuated according to another report published on

January 6. Four others cited as dismantled are currently populated.

January 9 *Yerushalim* reports that a recent tender for four industrial plots in the Mishor Adumim industrial park received no bids.

Export shipments from an Israeli concern located in the Mishor Adumim industrial park were held by European Union customs officials until payment of a 7 percent customs levy, part of the EU effort to exclude products produced in settlements from the EU-Israeli free trade agreement. (*Yerushalim*)

January 11 Approximately 150,000 people attend a rally organized by the YESHA Council in Tel Aviv's Rabin Square to protest Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon's new disengagement plan. (*Ha'aretz*)

January 13 One settler is killed and three wounded in a shooting carried out by the al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigade near the settlement of Talmon, near Ramallah. (*Palestine Report*)

January 14 Arutz 7 reports that according to official Palestinian Authority documents, Palestinians annually build between 800 and 900 illegal structures in East Jerusalem.

Israeli officials announce that the separation barrier's Jerusalem section, which will cover approximately 76 km, should be completed by the end of 2004. (*Palestine Report*)

January 15 Israeli defense minister Shaul Mofaz refuses to enforce a court order to remove settlers from Palestinian property in the Hebron market, citing the probability of settler opposition and the harm such a move would impose upon nearby Palestinians. (*Ha'aretz*)

January 16 Israel's environment ministry reports a continuing dispute with settlements in the central West Bank over their inadequate sewage treatment efforts. (*Kol Ha'ir*)

Four hundred rabbis from the United States and Europe urge the Sharon government to stop its practice of demolishing Palestinian dwellings built without permits in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. (*Ha'aretz*)

January 20 *Ha'aretz* reports the IDF bulldozing 30 homes and a mosque in the Rafah refugee camp in Gaza. The demolitions leveled built-up areas near the narrow 8 km "Philadelphia Corridor" that the IDF patrols along the Gaza-Egypt border.

January 21 Palestinians in Hebron report

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the creation of a 10m wide corridor around the settlement of Kiryat Arba in preparation for a 2m high fence that will encircle it. (*Palestine Report*)

January 22 The IDF grants hundreds of Jews permission to pray at the site of Joseph's Tomb in Nablus, entering via two buses under army protection. (Arutz 7)

January 23 *Kol Ha'Zeman* reports the demolition of five Palestinian dwellings in East Jerusalem, noting that since January 2000, 184 dwellings have been demolished in the city, 149 of them belonging to Palestinians.

January 25 Palestinians claim that Israeli demolitions in the Rafah camp have left more than 8,600 residents homeless in the preceding three years. Since September 2000, 869 homes have been demolished and another 629 partially destroyed in Rafah. (Associated Press)

January 28 Five members of the Islamic Jihad are killed in a firefight with the IDF near the settlement of Netzarim in Gaza. Four others, including an 11 year old, also are killed in crossfire. (*Mideast Mirror*)

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Gaza reports that since the beginning of January 2004, the IDF has totally or partially demolished 72 homes, leaving 584 Palestinians homeless. The demolitions have created a buffer zone from the Rafah passenger terminal along the border with Egypt to the coast.

January 29 The Jerusalem District Court sentences Yitzchak Pass and Mati Shvo, members of a Jewish underground, to 15 months in prison for plotting an attack against Palestinians. Both hail from the settlement outpost of Havat Ma'on. (*Ha'aretz*)

January 30 A six-month program to encourage the sale of dwellings on Israel's periphery, including the occupied territories, ends less successfully than anticipated. Only \$35 million of the \$39 million budgeted is subscribed. Settlement housing comprised more than \$12 million of the total.

February 2 Arutz 7 reports that 10,000 Israeli Jews have visited the Temple Mount since its reopening in October 2003. Before September 2000, when it was closed due to the al-Aqsa intifada, the annual number of Israeli Jewish visitors was only 4,000.

B'Tselem reports that 875,600 West Bank

Palestinians, 38% of the population, are being affected by Israel's separation barrier. Some 263,200 people living in 81 localities have become isolated in enclaves. There are reports that the Israeli cabinet is considering a proposal from National Security Advisor Giora Eiland to revise the route the barrier.

February 3 EU officials inform Israel that the solution to settlement exports proposed on November 24 by Deputy Prime Minister Olmert is unacceptable. (*Ma'ariv*)

February 7 The Elad settlement group takes possession of fifteen apartments in three buildings in the East Jerusalem settlement of David's City (Silwan). During the last fifteen years, 26 Jewish families have settled in the village opposite the Old City's Dung Gate. Palestinians are contesting the ownership of some of the dwellings. (Arutz 7)

February 11 *Ma'ariv* reports that the IDF has begun the groundwork to build an electronic fence around the settlements of Netzarim, Kfar Darom, and Morag. Fences are expected to surround an area much larger than the settlements themselves and include Palestinian agricultural land.

February 15 Winners of a land tender issued by the Israel Land Authority for 401 apartment units in Har Homa pay \$62.3 million, including \$34.9 million for development costs. One of the seven successful contractors, Hisam Karuf, is a Palestinian from East Jerusalem. Twelve hundred units have already been constructed in the settlement (*Ha'aretz, Yerushalim*)

February 16 Observers from the Temporary International Presence in Hebron report that Israeli policies have led to an exodus of more than 15,000 of Hebron's 35,000 Palestinian residents. (Associated Press)

The Knesset Finance Committee approves loans of more than \$11 million for the construction of 200 housing units in the West Bank. The committee also approves \$8 million for the Rural Construction Administration and \$1 million for settlement security in East Jerusalem. (Arutz 7)

February 17 An Israeli Treasury official reports that the outposts of Amuna and Migron are among 22 settlements that received \$20 million in subsidized mortgages from the Housing Ministry. (*Ha'aretz*)

February 18 Peace Now reports that there are 102 settlement "outposts" in the occupied territories. Of this number, 44 were established prior to February 2001, 55 before the introduction of the road map in June 2003, and 3 after June 2003. In addition, during 2003, 12 outposts were connected to the electrical grid, 8 have paved roads leading to their entrance, and 15 have begun building permanent structures.

February 22 *Ha'aretz* reports that changes in its route have resulted in the shortening of the Israeli separation barrier to 640 km, 80 km less than was approved by the government in 2003.

February 23 The International Court of Justice convenes hearings on the legality of the separation barrier.

Ha'aretz reports Treasury figures that the security barrier will cost \$3.5 million per km.

February 24 A plan sponsored by Israeli housing minister Efi Eitam from August 2003 to January 2004 increased sales in targeted locales by only 3 percent, the ministry reports. Sales increased in the settlements of Giva Benjamin and Beitar but declined in Ma'ale Adumim. (*Ma'ariv, Yediot Aharanot*, February 25)

February 26 *Ha'aretz* reports the killing of two Palestinians in Bidu when Israeli security forces clash with demonstrators protesting the separation barrier. A third man dies of a heart attack after inhaling tear gas during the demonstration.

Farmers living in Gaza settlements report difficulty renewing contracts for the export of their produce for 2005. Because of the Sharon plan to dismantle the Gaza settlements, exporters are concerned that the farms will no longer exist by then. (Arutz 7)

February 27 Two settlers are killed when shots are fired at their car near the Israeli village of Meitar. (*Ha'aretz*)

A rocket hits a home in Neve Dekalim, part of the Katif bloc in Gaza. No injuries are reported. (Arutz 7)

Israel Line reports that in the preceding three years, 75 homes in the Katif bloc have suffered direct hits from rockets, and a further 200 have been damaged when rockets and mortar rounds landed near them.

Letter from Prime Minister Sharon to President Bush

April 14, 2004

Dear Mr. President,

The vision that you articulated in your 24 June 2002 address constitutes one of the most significant contributions toward ensuring a bright future for the Middle East. Accordingly, the State of Israel has accepted the Roadmap, as adopted by our government. . . .

Having reached the conclusion that, for the time being, there exists no Palestinian partner with whom to advance peacefully toward a settlement and since the current impasse is unhelpful to the achievement of our shared goals, I have decided to initiate a process of gradual disengagement with the hope of reducing friction between Israelis and Palestinians. The Disengagement Plan is designed to improve security for Israel and stabilize our political and economic situation. It will enable us to deploy our forces more effectively until such time that conditions in the Palestinian Authority allow for the full implementation of the Roadmap to resume.

I attach, for your review, the main principles of the Disengagement Plan. This initiative, which we are not undertaking under the roadmap, represents an independent Israeli plan, yet is not inconsistent with the roadmap. According to this plan, the State of Israel intends to relocate military installations and all Israeli villages and towns in the Gaza Strip, as well as other military installations and a small number of villages in Samaria.

In this context, we also plan to accelerate construction of the Security Fence, whose completion is essential in order to ensure the security of the citizens of Israel. The fence is a security rather than political barrier, temporary rather than permanent, and therefore will not prejudice any final status issues including final borders. The route of the fence, as approve by our Government's decisions, will take into account, consistent with security needs, its impact on Palestinians not engaged in terrorist activities. . . .

The Weissglas Letter

The following is the text of a letter sent by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's bureau chief, Dov Weissglas, to the U.S. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice laying out the understandings reached between Sharon and U.S. President George W. Bush during their meeting at the White House on April 14, 2004.

Dear Dr. Rice,

On behalf of the Prime Minister of the State of Israel, Mr. Ariel Sharon, I wish to reconfirm the following understanding, which had been reached between us:

1. Restrictions on settlement growth: within the agreed principles of settlement activities, an effort will be made in the next few days to have a better definition of the construction line of settlements in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank]. An Israeli team, in conjunction with Ambassador

Kurtzer, will review aerial photos of settlements and will jointly define the construction line of each of the settlements.

2. Removal of unauthorized outposts: the Prime Minister and the Minister of defense, jointly, will prepare a list of unauthorized outposts with indicative dates of their removal; the Israeli Defense forces and/or the Israeli Police will take continuous action to remove those outposts in the targeted dates. The said list will be presented to Ambassador Kurtzer within 30 days.

5. The Government of Israel extends to the Government of the United States the following assurances:

a. The Israeli government remains committed to the two-state solution—Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security—as the key to peace in the Middle East.

b. The Israeli government remains committed to the Roadmap as the only route to achieving the two-state solution. c. The Israeli government believes that its disengagement plan and related steps on the West Bank concerning settlement growth, unauthorized outposts, and easing of restrictions on the movement of Palestinians not engaged in terror are consistent with the Roadmap and, in many cases, are steps actually called for in certain phases of the Roadmap.

d. The Israeli government believes that further steps by it, even if consistent with the Roadmap, cannot be taken absent the emergence of a Palestinian partner committed to peace, democratic reform, and the fight against terror.

e. Once such a Palestinian partner emerges, the Israeli government will perform its obligations, as called for in the Roadmap, as part of the performance-based plan set out in the Roadmap for reaching a negotiated final status agreement.

f. The Israeli government remains committed to the negotiation between the parties of a final status resolution of all outstanding issues.

h. As the Government of Israel has stated, the barrier being erected by Israel should be a security rather than a political barrier, should be temporary rather than permanent, and therefore not prejudice any final status issues including final borders, and its route should take into account, consistent with security needs, its impact on Palestinians not engaged in terrorist activities. ♦

DISENGAGEMENT PLAN, continued from page 5

XIV. Timetable

The evacuation process is planned for completion by the end of 2005.

The stages of the evacuation and the detailed timetable will be made known to the Americans.

XV. Summary

Israel expects broad international support for the disengagement move. This support is essential in order to bring the Palestinians to actually implement what is incumbent upon them in the areas of fighting terror and the carrying out of the reforms according to the road map, at which time the sides will be able to return to negotiations. ♦

only be achieved as a result of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, resulting in two viable sovereign and independent states based on the borders of 1967 (perhaps amended by agreement), living side by side in peace and security as laid out in the roadmap. This has been the main thread of European thinking from Venice in 1980 to Berlin in 1999 to Seville in 2002, right up to the latest European Council conclusions of last month.”

The unilateral aspect of Israel’s contemplated disengagement from the Gaza Strip reflects not only Sharon’s opposition to political dialogue with the Palestinian Authority over the nature and extent of Israel’s withdrawal. It also accommodates a Palestinian acknowledgment that it is preferable to accept rather than negotiate such an Israeli *fait accompli* and to exercise Palestinian sovereignty, in the spirit of the Palestine National Council decision in 1974, on any part of Palestine from which Israel withdraws.

Although Sharon has described his plan as a “mortal blow” to Palestinian aspirations for a state, *Ha’aretz* reports that a proposal for a joint memorandum of understanding among all Palestinian factions, issued by the leadership of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, including Tanzim leader Marwan Barghouti, describes Israel’s proposed evacuation of Gaza “as the most important achievement of the Palestinians in the intifada after ten years of Oslo did not move a single mobile home and during those years the settlements [population] doubled.”

The Disengagement Plan

After a decade of Israeli-Palestinian agreements that routinely ran to scores if not hundreds of pages, the brevity of the original disengagement plan is notable (see page 4).

The plan’s central strategic objective is to remove Gaza’s 1.3 million Palestinians from the sphere of Israel’s internationally recognized responsibility by formally ending the military occupation of Gaza that commenced in June 1967, while continuing to exercise control over the entry and exit of people and goods. No similar objective is intended for the West Bank, even that part of the area from which Israel will redeploy. Indeed, Israel will “evacuate” from the Gaza Strip, but merely “redeploy” in the West Bank.

In the case of the West Bank, the plan claims to create “territorial contiguity” in the region around Jenin, from which Israel will evacuate four settlements. This area will continue to be surrounded by Israeli-controlled checkpoints. Israel’s territorial objective for the remainder of the West Bank, in contrast, is defined as “transportation contiguity,” that is, connecting separate Palestinian enclaves by bridges, tunnels, and crossing points, all of which will continue to be controlled by Israeli forces.

The western security barrier now under construction will follow the route approved by the government. An eastern barrier has never been approved. According to Sharon, there will

“not [be] a fence being built there today, unless we need to. Here and there we will block access points to the Jordan Valley.”

In the security realm, Israel intends to continue exercising exclusive control over Gaza’s “security envelope”—land and sea borders and preventing the construction or operation of sea ports and air ports—according to existing “arrangements” that are more restrictive than Oslo-era “agreements.” It also claims the right to initiate preemptive military operations and to limit Palestinian arms to those specified in existing (Oslo) agreements. Sharon is well aware that the contradiction implied by continuing Israeli control over Gaza’s frontiers puts his strategic objective at risk.

Israel is currently considering a wide range of options regarding the disposition of settlement assets. These include the repatriation or destruction of moveable assets and the destruction of all buildings and infrastructure or their transfer, intact, in return for compensation, to Palestinians or a third party.

The Bush Letter

The April 14 letter from President Bush to Sharon signifies the extent to which U.S. policy has moved away from its earlier championship of negotiations and the road map as guides to Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy to a framework based on an Israeli-led approach excluding Palestinian, Arab, and international interlocutors from the decision-making core.

The Bush letter also marks a conceptual change in the U.S. approach. It outlines Washington’s preferences on the relationship between borders and Israeli settlements that are not materially different from the compromises discussed in the Camp David-Taba talks. But unlike these “previous efforts to negotiate a two-state solution,” Bush’s recent commitments were declared not in the context of final status negotiations between the parties, but in support of a unilateral, interim Israeli plan that may not materialize.

The letter violates the 1991 Letter of Assurances provided to the Palestinians by the first Bush administration on the eve of the October 1991 Madrid conference. That letter affirmed that “the United States has opposed and will continue to oppose settlement activity in the territories occupied in 1967.”

The letter to Sharon departs from U.S. support for the international consensus that Israel’s borders are to be based upon the need to be “defensible.” To that condition, the Bush letter adds that Israel’s borders should be determined by another element—“the new realities on the ground”—namely settlements. Defensible borders may not require Israel to annex territory captured in June 1967, but the inclusion of settlements within the borders of Israel does. Israel’s border, if based upon the Bush prescription, will be based not only on the new map created by dynamic Israeli settlement expansion but also on the territorial requirements necessary to defend it.

The letter’s description of the separation barrier as a tem-

porary, security instrument without influence on an agreed upon border marks the end of U.S. efforts to change or alter its course. These views recall eerily similar descriptions of settlement activity popular in official circles during the 1970s. Settlements, like the separation barrier, are “facts in the ground” that the Bush administration has now granted a central status in the determination of Israel’s final border.

The Sharon and Weissglas Letters

Sharon, in his letter to Bush, claims that the disengagement plan is “independent” of if not “inconsistent” with the road map. He promises to accelerate construction of the separation barrier and evidently views the Bush letter as a license to do so.

The Weissglas letter is more detailed. It recounts a series of bilateral understandings relating to settlements and other issues, including a bilateral effort to agree on a settlement by

settlement basis on a “better definition of the construction line of settlements.” The latter phrasing reportedly appeared in a letter from Weisglass in June 2003 outlining “understandings reached between Israel and the US regarding the Jewish settlements in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza: . . . No new towns will be built, and construction will be frozen in existing towns except for building within existing construction lines—as opposed to the municipal border.” The United States never officially acknowledged such an agreement. In any case, the terms Weisglass outlined one year ago failed to limit Israel’s continuing expansion of existing settlements or the establishment and consolidation of new settlement “outposts.”

The significance of these new understandings is that it suggests an unprecedented U.S. willingness to become a direct agent in the approval of Israel’s policy of settlement expansion. Such intimate involvement and complicity in this policy marks another significant shift in U.S. policy, which once viewed all settlement activity as illegal and a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. ♦

Israel must take the initiative to prevent political collapse, which could be ensured by an initiative which will decrease the ongoing friction between Israelis and Palestinians; friction which leads to the pictures in the international media. This move will contribute to the stabilization of security and reduction in terror, and is primarily a step which will anchor a determined American position in writing which rejects any political plan which endangers Israel, any plan which does not pre-condition political progress with the elimination of terror. The American commitment will free us from having to accept and face pressure to adopt policies which do not consider it necessary for the Palestinians to fight terror.

We must take the political initiative in our hands in order to ensure the political and security interests of Israel for many years to come. These principles are at the core of the Disengagement Plan, which is the right thing for Israel to do: establishing a security line along which the IDF will be deployed in areas essential for Israel’s defense; erecting a physical obstacle which assists in the defense of Israeli citizens and makes the penetration of terrorists to large population centers more difficult; withdrawal from areas which will clearly not be under Israeli control in any future permanent agreement and which are sources of great friction between Israelis and Palestinians, such as the Gaza Strip; and obtaining the political support of our friends around the world, headed by the United States, for the plan.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon at Israel’s Annual Hi-Tech Conference, March 31, 2004

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