

REPORT ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENT IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

A Bimonthly Publication of the Foundation for Middle East Peace

Volume 15 Number 1

January-February 2005

SETTLERS LOSING THE BATTLE FOR GAZA SETTLEMENTS

By Geoffrey Aronson

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to "disengage" Israel from the Gaza Strip and a small part of the northern West Bank achieved political and operational critical mass in late 2004.

A December vote in the Likud Central Committee opened the way to a national unity "disengagement coalition" that features the Labor party as a junior partner, marking a signal political defeat for forces within Sharon's own party who opposed the plan.

The operational momentum of the plan also continued to grow. In early December the more than 200 teachers in Gaza settlements met with officials in the Ministry of Education to reach agreement on new employment after the evacuation of the 17 settlements in the Gaza Strip and four in the northern West Bank. On December 26, Yonatan Bassi, head of the government Disen-

agement Administration, announced, "All of the residents of [the Gaza settlement] Pe'at Sadeh, 20 families in all, as well as five additional families from other settlements, will move together to moshav Mavqi'im" in Israel.

Military and logistical preparations for the \$680 million redeployment proceed apace, including advanced consideration of the construction of a trench along the Gaza-Egypt border—and the associated destruction of perhaps hundreds of Palestinian dwellings along its route—meant to prevent the construction of arms smuggling tunnels. The evacuation of Gaza settlements is to begin on July 3, 2005, and run for twelve weeks.

While the fate of the settlements noted in the plan has been all but sealed, the vast majority of settlements continue to thrive and prosper. The settler population increased by six percent during 2004 to 250,179 (not including 180,000 in East Jerusalem) and almost 4,000 new settlement dwelling units are currently under construction.

Notwithstanding the ever-present momentum of settlement expansion throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the settler-led campaign to block implementation of the disengagement plan, and more critically the campaign to undermine any future evacuation of additional settlements in the West Bank, has suffered a cascade of setbacks unprecedented in the history of Israel's 37-year settlement enterprise. These reversals have alarmed the settlement movement as never before and as

a consequence have raised fears of a violent and perhaps bloody summer as settlements are evacuated.

The IDF, charged with the task of evacuating areas slated for disengagement, remains profoundly ambivalent about its mission. One day after settler leaders warned chief-of-staff Moshe Ya'alon that thousands of religious soldiers would not follow orders to evacuate settlements, Deputy Defense Minister Ze'ev Boim said that such a refusal could torpedo the disengagement plan. As the IDF issues the operational orders guiding evacuation, those settlers and their allies committed to physically obstructing the withdrawal are ambiguously described as "our forces." As the Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv* described it, "In such a fashion a situation may be created in which 'our forces' will be required to evacuate 'our forces' from their homes, to manacle them and to confine them to holding camps. In the most extreme instance, 'our forces' (settlers and right-wing activists) battle 'our forces' (soldiers and police), even going so far as to open fire upon them."

One senior member of the security forces was reported to have called this scenario "a coalition of the insane. Thousands of settlers hunker down in the settlements scheduled for evacuation. Some of them are prepared to use arms. Settlers and soldiers grab each others' throats while Hamas missiles fly overhead."

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TO OUR READERS

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict offers President George W. Bush a stunning opportunity to demonstrate the sincerity of his intention, grandly announced in his January 20 inaugural speech, to extend the blessings of freedom and democracy abroad. What better place to begin than Israel and Palestine? Where else could American leadership so readily combine the rewards of commitment to principle, morality and human rights with enhancing America's national security and restoring its credibility?

The Palestinians offer a ripe opportunity for U.S. democratization goals in the Middle East. They are well prepared, with their high level of education and experience with grass roots and civic organization. The recent orderly election of President Mahmoud Abbas, municipal elections, and forthcoming parliamentary elections confirm their eagerness for democracy. But democracy for Palestinians cannot be achieved without liberty. The notion, suggested by President Bush last December, that democracy and reform must precede Palestinian statehood, puts the cart before

the horse. True freedom and democracy for Palestinians require an end to Israel's occupation and settlements and the emergence of a sovereign Palestinian state with viable borders and economic prospects.

Israel's liberty and democracy also depend upon liberation of the Palestinians. Israel's democracy cannot long survive the corrupting burdens of occupation and the attendant repression of a potential demographic majority of Palestinians.

Add to this confluence of Israeli and Palestinian interests a new, more centrist coalition in Israel, Sharon's plans to evacuate Gaza settlements, the declining power of the settler right (described in this issue), plus polls showing a convergence of Israeli and Palestinian public views on the ingredients for peace, and the opportunity for renewed American diplomatic leadership becomes even more promising. So what are we waiting for?

Philip C. Wilcox, Jr.

Sharon Faces Settler Tsunami



Yediot Abarot, January 5, 2005

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PALESTINIANS CONSIDER USES FOR SETTLEMENTS AFTER DISENGAGEMENT

Palestinians are considering potential uses for settlement areas to be evacuated by Israel later this year in the Gaza Strip and West Bank as part of its disengagement plan. The following are excerpts from Reintegration and Development of Evacuated Areas, prepared by the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Planning.

Gaza Strip

The sand dune areas in the north and south, where the two major colony blocs [Nissanit and the Katif bloc] are located, contain the best water aquifers, represent landscapes and natural features of very high value, and constitute an important potential for environmentally sound, sustainable agriculture. According to the *Regional Plan for Gaza Governorates*, it is of the utmost importance that these areas are protected against unplanned development. As a rule, the sand dune areas will be reintegrated as areas under environmental protection against urban development. The assets in the urban built-up areas of the colonies must therefore be removed, because they endanger Palestinian long-term sustainability requirements. This would also include service buildings, such as fire stations, clinics, and schools.

Netzarim can be a part of the urban growth strategy of Gaza City and would serve as a core for low density development.

Morag is situated on the main road between Khan Yunis and Rafah. The location does not coincide with the growth strategy for these two cities, however, Morag is interesting because of its function as an agricultural colony. It could serve as a research and development facility in agriculture, in connection with university expansion plans in the south. . . .

Kfar Darom does not coincide with growth strategies for Deir el Balah, but neither does the location contradict them. . . . These considerations point to the conclusion that Kfar Darom is better suited for agricultural purposes than for urban functions.

Erez [industrial zone] will retain its significance after the withdrawal of Israeli forces and should be integrated and strengthened as an industrial zone when transferred to Palestinian control.

The **Neve Dekalim** industrial plant does not coincide with any Palestinian needs or interests for development. It contradicts the environmental considerations and, therefore, must be removed and the soil restored.

Some of the sand dune colonies [Katif bloc] have a typical suburban residential quality that could be utilized as tourist villages/resorts. They contain residential and recreational structures such as the hotel and pool in the south, and restaurants, playgrounds, [and] sports facilities in other areas that could be reintegrated within a Palestinian tourism and recreation concept. Further investigation is required in order to ensure their compliance with the relevant environmental considerations. These units, if reintegrated, must not be allowed to form clusters for random densification based

on pure speculation.

Areas used for agriculture can be easily reintegrated as such, with an emphasis on changing cropping patterns and irrigation methods, etc., to minimize water use such as [in] horticulture and production of value crops, e.g., vegetables, strawberries, and flowers. This concerns all colony areas.

The road network in the colony areas coincides with the configuration of the regional road network in the Gaza Strip. Hence, the main road network of the colonies should be kept intact. The utility of local roads will be decided upon after inspection.

Infrastructure, such as electricity, water, [and] wastewater and telecommunication networks and facilities, can largely be taken over and reused, pending inspection and evaluation. . . .

All formal and informal solid waste dumps must be removed. Toxic and otherwise harmful waste [must also be] completely removed, and the natural state restored.

West Bank

Israeli withdrawal from the four colonies with maintenance of the existing closure system would not bring any benefits to the Palestinian community. It would provide only marginal benefits for Palestinian development. In political and humanitarian terms, mere withdrawal will not contribute to any significant improvement. . . .

Ganim and **Qadim** are located within a Nature Protection Area. There are two alternative uses of the area, which to varying degrees, could be combined:

- Rehabilitate the area as a natural reserve, reestablish lost vegetation, and reintegrate it into the Nature Protection Area.

- Explore the area's potential for local tourism and recreation based on ecological principles and sustainable use. . . .

Sa Nur is located within a valuable agricultural area. . . . The site has potential use primarily in military/administrative uses.

Homesh is a hilltop settlement. Because of topographical conditions, according to the *Regional Plan for the West Bank Governorates*, it has no potential for urban development. Before colonization, it was used for agricultural purposes, primarily horticulture and grazing. It should thus be rehabilitated as an agricultural area, where fruit trees could be replanted, etc.

The northern part of [the] West Bank is neither an independently functional territory nor a political entity in itself, particularly if existing restrictions on movement of goods, services, people, and capital persist. Full withdrawal would still leave the area isolated from its regional center, Nablus, from the rest of the West Bank and Gaza, and from neighboring countries.

Mere withdrawal from the four colonies would create a limited number of minor project possibilities—at a local level—which would represent a very marginal but positive contribution. ♦

SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

September 1 The Jerusalem municipality reports that 3,000 Palestinian students and scores of their teachers must transit Jerusalem's northern security barrier to attend public schools in the city. (*Ha'aretz*)

September 2 *Globes* reports the estimated cost of the Israeli disengagement plan to be between \$600 million and \$900 million, half for removing Jewish settlers and half for the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces and military infrastructure.

September 3 Israel's security agencies are concerned about the increasing number of plots by extreme Jewish right-wing activists and settlers against security officials involved in removing settlement outposts and monitoring the radical right-wing. (*Ha'aretz*)

A new organization—"Our Wailing Wall"—is spearheading efforts to establish regular prayers in Jerusalem's Old City Muslim Quarter near the "Little Wall." (*Kol Ha'Ir*)

Four Palestinians are killed and twenty-five injured by IDF fire after the discovery of a 450 meter-long tunnel from Deir al Balah to the nearby Gaza settlement of Kfar Darom.

September 5 The Jerusalem municipality's education authority reports a large increase in the number of students seeking to register for schools in East Jerusalem because many families are relocating to areas that lie West of the barrier. (*Ma'ariv*)

The Israeli Defense Ministry begins construction on a 40 km stretch of the separation barrier southwest of Hebron, five days after a Palestinian suicide attack in Beersheva kills 16 people. Work also begins on a 6 km segment along the route of the Patrols Road on the Green Line, west of the Palestinian village of Beit Awa and close to the Shekef settlement. (*Ha'aretz*)

September 8 *Ha'aretz* reports Agriculture Minister Israel Katz's intention to expropriate 31,200 dunams of agricultural land in the Jordan Valley to "hold and designate it for Jewish settlements in the valley and to prevent the possibility of their being taken over by hostile elements." The plan involves 3,200 dunams of land now occupied by the IDF and another 28,000 dunams of grazing land as well as a program of incentives to encourage Israeli Jews to settle in the region.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon declares that the settlement blocs of Ariel, Gush Etzion, and Ma'ale Adumim will be on the western

side of the separation barrier. (*Ha'aretz*)

September 9 Following a hearing by the Israeli High Court of Justice, the State Prosecutor's Office agrees to refrain from demolishing the residences of 83 Palestinians in the southern Hebron Hills near the settlement of Susiya. The residents agree to apply for retroactive building permits. (*Ha'aretz*)

Five settlers cooperating with the Jewish section of Israel's internal security agency Shabak have been exposed by extremists and subject to protests by the radical groups "Kach" and "Kahane Lives." One who sought to move from one settlement near Hebron to another in the north of the West Bank was refused by the local council when his activities became known. Another left a settlement near Ramallah and now resides abroad. (*Ma'ariv*)

September 10 A 6 km section of the security barrier will be demolished and rebuilt to locate the village of Jabarra and its 250 inhabitants east of the barrier. As a result of the High Court decision to invalidate the trajectory of the barrier near Jerusalem, 14,500 dunams initially marked for inclusion west of the barrier will now be located to the east of it. A change will also be made at the village of Azun Atma, where 1,000 Palestinians reside. They will be encircled by the barrier and have free access to the West Bank instead of being located on the western (Israeli) side of the barrier. (*Ha'aretz*)

September 12 Seventy thousand Israelis demonstrate in Jerusalem against the disengagement plan.

September 20 Israel's use of \$9 billion in U.S. loan guarantees is extended by two years to five years (2007), with an option for a one-year extension (2008). Israel has already financed bonds backed by \$3.4 billion in U.S. guarantees. (*Ma'ariv*)

September 22 In the first suicide attack in Jerusalem in seven months, an 18-year-old Palestinian woman kills 2 Israeli border police and wounds seventeen other people in the French Hill neighborhood of East Jerusalem. (Reuters)

A 22-year-old Israeli woman becomes the first civilian killed by direct mortar fire, which hit her home in Neve Dekalim. Arutz 7 reports that there have been more than 4,500 Palestinian rocket and shelling attacks

on the Katif bloc in southern Gaza since September 2000. (Arutz 7)

September 24 *Ha'aretz* reports that Jerusalem mayor Uri Lupolianski wants to rezone the neighborhood of Wadi Juz in East Jerusalem to settle Jews in the area.

Kol Ha'Ir reports that an assistant to Jerusalem's mayor is involved in the establishment of an unauthorized settlement outpost near his home in the settlement of Kfar Adumim.

September 28 An Israeli court places a man under house arrest in the West Bank settlement of Itamar until legal proceedings are concluded against him for shooting a Palestinian. The settler claims he shot the man in self-defense when the Palestinian tried to run him off the road. A Palestinian witness told police that the settler opened fire without provocation. (*Ha'aretz*)

September 29 Israel begins "Operation Days of Penitence," its largest military incursion in Gaza this year. (UN News)

The IDF demolishes 10 houses in Khan Yunis in response to the killing of three Givati Brigade soldiers near Morag in Gaza's Katif bloc and the firing of a mortar shell on September 22 that killed a woman in Neve Dekalim. (*Ha'aretz*)

Three Palestinians are wounded by gunfire while attempting to infiltrate the Kfar Darom settlement in Gaza. (Arutz 7)

Israeli troops enter the Jabalya refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip after Hamas members fire a Qassam rocket into Israel, killing two small children in Sderot. (*Ha'aretz*)

September 30 *Ha'aretz* reports an Israeli woman and an IDF Nahal infantryman killed in separate Palestinian attacks in the northern Gaza Strip.

A female settler is killed while jogging outside the northern Gaza settlement of Aley Sinai. (*Ha'aretz*)

October 1 *Ha'aretz* reports the IDF controlling a 9 km stretch of territory on the outskirts of the Jabalya refugee camp in Gaza in an effort to keep Sderot and surrounding areas of Israel out of range of Qassam rockets, whose maximum range is 9 km.

Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, rabbi of Bet El and a prominent voice in the settler community, issues a ruling aimed at observant soldiers

SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

and officers that it is “forbidden to refuse an order to evacuate a [settlement] community.” (*Ma’ariv*)

October 3 More than 35 Israeli tanks and 5 bulldozers move into Tel al-Zatar, north-east of Jabalya, razing at least seven houses, two factories, and a kindergarten. (AP)

A 42-unit housing development is opened in the outpost of Brukin, southeast of Ariel. Established without formal authorization in 1999, the settlement has a current population of 54 families. The ministry of housing sponsored the construction. (*Ha’aretz*)

October 5 Two mortar shells hit the Katif bloc settlement of Atzmona, damaging a home. A third shell aimed at the Katif bloc settlement of Kfar Darom, lands in Palestinian controlled territory. No one is injured. (Arutz 7)

The Palestinian Legislative Council passes a resolution opposing rocket attacks on Israel. (Mideast Mirror)

October 7 The UN issues a report warning of an impending humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. It estimates that Israel demolished an average of 120 Palestinian residential buildings each month in 2004. (BBC)

October 10 *Ha’aretz* reports the arrest of three settlers from the northern West Bank settlement of Tapuah on suspicion of setting fire to an olive grove in Kfar Yosef and harassing Palestinian residents. Police chief superintendent Chaim Fadlon states, “Every year during this season, there is harassment against Palestinians harvesting their olives.”

October 11 A Palestinian farmer is shot and critically wounded in his olive grove near the settlement of Yitzhar. The IDF notes that the attack occurred in an area where Palestinians are expected to “coordinate” with the IDF to provide IDF protection for harvesters. Palestinians blame soldiers, while the IDF blames a Jewish settler. (*Ha’aretz*)

October 12 The IDF limits the five-week Palestinian olive harvest to one to three days in 30 villages in the Nablus area as a result of settler attacks in previous years against harvesting in areas near settlement fences. The IDF claims that it will guard harvesters on the assigned days. Palestinians complain that the harvest cannot be completed in such a timeframe and that the order is a prelude

to land confiscation. (*Ha’aretz*)

The first “outpost” settlement in the Gaza Strip—Teferet Israel—is established in the Katif bloc. (*Yediot Aharanot*)

October 13 *Ha’aretz* reports a Jerusalem contractor has been dumping construction materials on Palestinian agricultural land in the wadi between the settlement of Beitar Ilit and Nahalin.

October 14 In an 18-page report, UN representative for human rights John Dugard accuses Israel of human rights violations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including “massive and wanton destruction of property” during military operations in the Gaza Strip. “Bulldozers have destroyed homes in a purposeless manner and have savagely dug up roads, including electricity, sewage and water lines.” The report states that in the last four years, “1,497 buildings have been demolished in Rafah, affecting over 15,000 people.” The report maintains that some of the destruction is for operational purposes, but often it is not. (*Ha’aretz*)

October 15 Sixty rabbis, among them a former chief rabbi, the head of the YESHA rabbinical council, and numerous settlement rabbis, call upon soldiers to refuse orders to evacuate settlements. (*Ha’aretz*)

Israel ends Operation Days of Penitence. At least 107 people are reported killed and nearly 200 homes destroyed. (UN News)

October 16 *Ha’aretz* reports attacks by masked settlers dressed in black from the Hebron area settlement of Maon and the neighboring outpost Maon farm on international volunteers accompanying Palestinian children from Kfar Tuba on their way to school in Kfar Tuwana.

October 18 The Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group reports that the Israeli army has destroyed or partially damaged nearly 100 buildings, including homes and schools, water and electricity networks, roads, and other vital infrastructure in Gaza since September 30.

October 19 The *Washington Post* reports that according to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the Israeli military has destroyed at least 1,686 houses in the Rafah refugee camp and adjacent city of Rafah. In the last four years of conflict, nearly 17,000 people—about 10% of the Rafah population—have been left homeless.

October 20 A Tel Aviv University study finds that settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip receive at least twice as much financial aid per capita from the Israeli Interior Ministry as Jewish communities in Israel and three times as much as Israeli Arab communities. (*Ha’aretz*)

October 22 *Ha’aretz* reports the distribution of pamphlets in synagogues declaring Brig. Gen. Ilan Paz, head of the civil administration in the West Bank, “an enemy of settlement”, because he refuses to grant legitimacy to settlement outposts. Right-wing Internet sites call for physical attacks against him.

October 24 In retaliation for the October 21 assassination of two Hamas leaders, Hamas fires some 30 mortar shells at Neve Dekalim, in the Katif bloc; Netzarim, in the central Gaza strip; and Nissanit, in northern Gaza. A number of homes are damaged in Neve Dekalim, but no one is hurt. (*Ha’aretz*)

Near Rachel’s Tomb in Bethlehem, two Jewish families move into a house purchased two years earlier with permission of then-defense minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezar and the civil administration. (*Ha’aretz*)

October 25 Former Labor Party leader and MK Amram Mitzna tells residents of Aley Sinai that their settlement, along with those of Dugit and Nissanit, could remain under Israeli control if the disengagement plan is coordinated with the Palestinians. (*Ha’aretz*)

The IDF removes the two Jewish families attempting to settle near Rachel’s Tomb in Bethlehem. (Mideast Mirror)

October 26 Settlers at Outpost 725, near the West Bank settlement of Yitzhar prevent an ambulance from reaching Salman Yussuf Saadi, an 18-year-old Palestinian from Orif who was shot by the outpost’s security officer and died before the ambulance arrived. (*Ha’aretz*)

IDF forces open fire on two Palestinians reportedly placing an explosive device near the Gaza Strip settlement of Ganei Tal. (*Ha’aretz*)

Arutz 7 reports that the Katif bloc has counted 4,630 shells and rockets fired at homes and property in the past four years, an average of more than three per day.

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As the political prospects favoring implementation of the disengagement plan have grown, so too has the militancy of the settler, religious, and right-wing opposition. The statements and actions of these opponents, however, have more often than not been uncharacteristically politically inept, highlighting their political marginalization and the Israeli public's increasing disaffection with their efforts.

The settlers made a key strategic mistake in underestimating Sharon's determination to evacuate a few settlements in order to secure the future of most of them. Many veterans of Gush Emunim had long collaborated with Sharon in their shared mission to expand the settlement enterprise throughout the occupied territories. But their motives were always based upon different assumptions. Whereas settler support for such activity has always been unconditional and absolute, Sharon, true to his political heritage, always viewed the colonization of the territories, even when it occurred in opposition to government policy, as an instrument for realizing state security, a goal viewed by the settlement movement as incidental if not irrelevant to their divinely inspired mission. As they embarked upon a campaign in mid-2004 to scuttle the plan, disengagement opponents discovered that they lacked the political patronage and military support that they had always enjoyed and that was necessary in assuring that their interests would remain paramount.

Throughout the summer and fall, Sharon's plan survived a series of coalition, party, and popular challenges by settlers and their political allies. As these campaigns failed, extra-parliamentary and extra-political actions were initiated, which while not in and of themselves new, were increasingly viewed as illegitimate by the public-at-large that supports the Sharon plan by a wide margin. In June 2004, for example, Uri Elitzur, editor of the settler monthly *Nekuda*, justified a soldier's refusal of an order to evacuate a settlement, and violent opposition, including injury to soldiers, in resisting orders to evacuate settlements. In September, Nadia Matter, a leader of Women in Green, described the newly formed Disengagement Administration as "a modern-day Judenrat," raising associations between the Sharon administration and the Nazis are so explosive culturally that they all but guarantee the political marginalization of their proponents. In October, Abraham Shapira, a former chief rabbi of Israel, called upon religious soldiers to refuse evacuation orders, claiming that "expulsion of Jews from their homes is absolutely forbidden." Sixty rabbis endorsed his declaration to defy a "secular order" rather than ignore one ostensibly originating in the Bible. Days after the Likud Central Committee voted in December to join with the Labor Party in a unity government, the YESHA Council, the official governmental representative of all settlements, endorsed settler leader Pinchas Wallerstein's call to break the law if necessary to prevent disengagement. Soon thereafter, some settlers in Gaza began wearing orange patches in the shape of a Star of David, once again employing

Holocaust imagery in the service of their efforts. The plan confirmed the image of Sharon's opponents, in the words of one *Jerusalem Post* columnist, as a "crowd of fanatics." A public outcry forced the abandonment of the action within days. In January 2005, settlers once again violently confronted soldiers sent to dismantle two mobile homes placed in a settlement outpost without authorization. At one point, an IDF soldier fired a warning shot.

The program of opposition marked by exploitation of Holocaust imagery, calls for insubordination by soldiers, and appeals to the supremacy of divine imperatives over civil laws has placed settlers and their supporters at the ineffective margins of political action. What distinguishes this campaign from previous efforts, however, is not so much the use of these instruments. Settlers have, after all, never honored the sanctity of law when it obstructed their aims. Ariel Sharon himself once famously advised soldiers to ignore orders to confront settlers. What has changed, however, is the use of these tactics in a political environment that is no longer committed to their maximalist territorial agenda. This is not to suggest that the settlement movement itself is in danger or that Sharon has adopted the Geneva plan. The facts on the ground continue to attest that this is not the case. But it is this clash of interests that serves to highlight the radical and marginal core of the settlement movement as it has always been, from the days more than two decades ago when settlers clashed with the IDF at Sebastia to the recent confrontations at an outpost near Yitzhar. ♦

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A report from the UN Commission on Human Rights concludes that during the IDF's Operation Rainbow in Rafah from May 13-25, 2004, 289 buildings housing 3,800 people were demolished. UNRWA finds that during Operation Days of Penitence the IDF demolished 91 houses and left 675 Palestinians homeless. It also announces that an average of 45 Gaza residents per day, or 1,360 a month, are made homeless. (*Jerusalem Post*)

October 27 The Knesset approves the Sharon government's disengagement plan in a 67-45 vote, with 7 abstentions. (Arutz 7)

Ha'aretz reports that for the second time this year, Israel has raised money by issuing bonds in U.S. capital markets backed by U.S. loan guarantees. Israel raised \$4.1 billion using guarantees approved in 2003. In 2004 the Bush administration chose not to reduce the guarantees by deducting Israeli expenditures on settlements as it did in 2003. Sources believe that the United States is easing pressure on Israel to evacuate outposts and freeze settlement construction in order to focus on implementing the disengagement plan.

October 31 The U.S. administration rejects as unsatisfactory the list of unauthorized outposts in the West Bank presented by the Israeli Defense Ministry. Twenty-three established outposts were listed—the U.S. government believes the number to be much higher. (*Ha'aretz*)

A Flexible Freeze at State

Question: Is it also your [view] that Israel is committed to all parts of the road map, including the freeze on settlements, which would include natural growth?

State Department Deputy Spokesman: Those are commitments that have been made—to work toward a freeze of settlement activity, including natural growth.

Question: Well, to work towards a freeze in settlement activity? No, no, the roadmap says freeze all settlement activity.

Spokesman: Yes.

Question: Not work towards a freeze.

Spokesman: And we are—our position is that that is the goal that we are working toward, a freeze on settlement activity.

Question: And in the meantime, it may be okay for there to be growth of settlements?

Spokesman: We need to get from where we are to a freeze, and that is a process that we are engaged with the Israelis on.

State Department Daily Press Briefing
Adam Ereli, Deputy Spokesman
October 6, 2004

No Penalty for Settlement Expansion

The Bush Administration has decided not to penalize Israel for its settlement construction activities in the occupied territories by reducing the amount of U.S. loan guarantees made available to Israel. The three year \$9 billion program of guarantees is similar to a \$10 billion program established in the early 1990s to facilitate the absorption of Soviet immigrants. Last year the United States deducted \$170 million from the loan guarantee amount.

The More Things Change, the More They Remain the Same

Since the summer of 2002, Israeli officials have claimed, and U.S. officials have denied, that the Bush administration has agreed to settlement expansion within the built-up areas of existing settlements and that all settlement expansion taking place is consistent with that limitation. Notwithstanding the problematic nature of such an agreement, which is a deliberately ineffective means of constraining settlement expansion, even a cursory survey of expansion activities in the West Bank suggests that Israel is blatantly ignoring its territorial restrictions.

The settlement of Zufim, for example, near Kalkilya, now home to 200 families, is set to expand by ten times that number on lands both north and east of the existing community located to the west of the security barrier. Yehezkel Lein, a researcher for the Israeli human rights organization Betselem, noted in an article appearing in the *Guardian* on December

14, 2004, “In the plan for Zufim there is an extension to the north of the settlement that was already approved. There is also another expansion to the east. But there is no territorial contiguity between Zufim and the new construction, so it is really a new settlement.”

The *Guardian* reported that Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev, when asked to explain how this construction was consistent with the purported understanding with Washington, answered, “We are talking about places that it’s accepted will remain inside Israel whatever the outcome of final status talks. It’s possible that in those places the thinking is different.”

The idea of a formal U.S.-Israel agreement establishing permissible settlement expansion in each settlement has been an on-again-off-again proposition. Professionals at the State Department and elsewhere remain vehemently opposed to such an effort, arguing that it engages the U.S. in micro-managing settlement expansion and formally makes Washington an accomplice in an Israeli effort U.S. policy has opposed for almost four decades.

Support for the idea is said to be centered at the Middle East bureau at the National Security Council headed by Elliott Abrams.

The *Washington Post* reported on October 30, 2004, that “some key administration officials, such as Elliott Abrams, the top Middle East specialist on the White House’s National Security Council staff, privately have long pressed for a more expansive definition of natural growth. After [Israeli prime minister Ariel] Sharon announced his plan to withdraw from Gaza last December, a senior administration official told reporters at a briefing that the purpose of a settlement freeze is to make sure additional settlers would not impede Palestinian life or prevent the formation of a viable Palestinian state. It makes no difference, he said, if the Israelis add another house within a block of existing homes. ‘We have not taken the position there has to be an end to natural growth in settlements,’ he said.”

Washington’s support for the natural growth of settlements was first declared in March 1993, during the Clinton administration.

“Parsing a Settlement Freeze”

We are concerned about all kinds of settlement activity, to include different definitions of what growth is. And we’re working with the Israelis to define what a settlement is and what the difference is between natural growth and expansion, and is natural growth something that is consistent with the Israelis’ commitments to us.

Secretary of State Colin Powell,
Egyptian Television interview, October 29, 2004

BUSH LIGHTS A CANDLE FOR OTNIEL

On the evening of December 27, 2002, two Palestinian members of Islamic Jihad from the village of Dura, in the Hebron area, infiltrated the settlement of Otniel by cutting the fence surrounding the settlement of 400. They wore army uniforms and carried M-16 rifles, ammunition, and hand grenades. St.-Sgt. Noam Apter, 23, a resident of the settlement of Shilo doing his military service at Otniel, was one of four people killed when the attackers burst into the kitchen of the religious military academy Apter was attending. Apter managed to close the door to the adjoining dining room, where scores of student soldiers were eating, before he was killed.

According to a December 9, 2004 report by the settler news agency Arutz 7, this year, to commemorate Hanukah and Apter's memory, a Florida congregation, one of whose rabbis once taught at the Otniel academy, "constructed a huge menorah with a picture of Noam beside it in his memory. U.S. president George W. Bush heard about the menorah and about Apter's heroics and requested that the Chanukah menorah be lit at the White House."

The territorial dimension of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians—symbolized by the Palestinian attack in

Otniel—is dismissed by Bush as representative of the failed policies of the past.

"Achieving peace in the Holy land is not just a matter of pressuring one side or the other on the shape of a border or the site of a settlement," Bush said in a December 1, 2004 speech outlining his second term foreign policy priorities. "This approach has been tried before without success. As we negotiate the details of peace, we must look to the heart of the matter, which is the need for Palestinian democracy."

Israel, for its part, remains wedded to a policy of creating facts on the ground, evidenced by an advertisement at http://www.geocities.com/m_yericho/otniel.htm:

"[Following a recent expansion program, Otniel] is now ready to consider applications by religious families of all ages and socio-economic groups. All applicants must be interviewed and are subject to acceptance and approval by the Otniel New Residents Committee.

"Families purchasing or building their homes in Otniel are entitled to special mortgages and loans totaling up to \$56,000. Of these mortgages and loans, approximately \$21,000 are automatically converted into a grant (forgiven) if the family continues to reside in Otniel for 15 years." ♦

Ben Shohat, who grew up in the Ramot [settlement] neighborhood in Jerusalem, came to Yitzhar "because here they live the ideals. Here people are closer to the truth and to the Holy One, blessed be he, than in other places."

What truth?

Ben Shohat: "Judaism, which is endangering your democracy."

Is there no Judaism outside of Yitzhar?

"Of course there is, but here the commitment is many times greater, and also there is no inhibition about touching the points of friction today—settling the land and war on the enemy."

Ben Shohat's attitude toward the state is complex. The dispute is between a Jewish state and a state of Israelis; between a Jewish state and a democratic state. "Together—it isn't going to work! Judaism is unequivocally contradictory to democracy, and the laws of the Torah take precedence over the laws of the state. Whom will I obey? My Creator or a commander who might be a year or two older than me? I'm not dealing with the question of how I will act on the day of the evacuation. I'm doing everything, now already, so that the day will never arrive."

Nadav Shragai, "A Rehearsal for the Real Thing?,"
Ha'aretz, January 7, 2005

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