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

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

To say that the failure of Israel’s
occupation was inevitable, however, does
not answer questions critical to under-
standing the circumstances that com-
pelled Israel to acknowledge it as such.
If the collapse of occupation in Gaza
was preordained, why didn’t Israel evac-
What lessons can be drawn from the
end of Israel’s ill-fated venture? Why
did Prime Minister Ariel Sharon decide
to leave Gaza? What convinced him
and his colleagues that settling in Gaza
was no less than a “historic mistake?”
And what does the retreat from Gaza
and the abandonment of all settlements
there suggest about Israeli policy regard-
ing the sustainability of settlements in
the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the
Golan Heights?

1. Facts on the ground are not
necessarily permanent.

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

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

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

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

Gaza’s revolt against Israeli rule did
not end during the Oslo years. Settle-
ments became armed camps, and the
interests of Palestinians living there
were sacrificed to the settlers’ well-
being. This confrontation only hardened
during the Al Aqsa intifada of

In Israel, the depth of popular alien-
ation from the settlement enterprise in
Gaza, and the limited social base of its
supporters, became clear during the
failed campaign led by settlement and
rabbinic leaders to stop the evacuation.
Indeed, most Israelis were “disengaged”
Many analysts think Prime Minister Ariel Sharon withdrew Israeli troops and settlers from Gaza because of the Palestinian “demographic threat” to Israel’s Jewish and democratic character. In this Report, Jeff Aronson points out that Sharon, who has dismissed demographic concerns in the past, made his decision primarily for security reasons.

If Sharon were indeed concerned about the impact of Israeli control of millions of unwilling Palestinians on Israel’s Jewish, democratic character, he would move quickly to negotiate a withdrawal from the West Bank and East Jerusalem as well. Instead, he is moving unilaterally to cement Israeli control over these areas through expanded settlement and the separation barrier.

Sharon surely knows that his plans to confine Palestinians to disconnected enclaves surrounded by Israeli settlements in the West Bank will not be accepted by any legitimate Palestinian leader. Even without Gaza and its 1.3 million Palestinians, Israel still controls over 2 million unwilling Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem who demand freedom. The corrupting influence of occupation on Israel as a Jewish, democratic state is hardly resolved by Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza.

Israel and the United States are now demanding the rule of law, transparency, and reform in the Palestinian Authority as a condition for further moves by Israel. Much less attention has been given to the corruption and abuse of the law spawned by Israeli settlements. The recent, official Sasson Report revealed pervasive violations of Israeli domestic law in building more than 110 settlement outposts, yet construction continues without accountability. Also, armed Israeli settlers regularly take the law into their own hands with impunity, abusing Palestinians and undermining the principle, so often preached to the Palestinians, that governments must maintain a monopoly of force.

The Messiah Skips Disengagement

Ha’aretz, August 15, 2005
SETTLEMENT POPULATION DATA

Ten Most Populous West Bank Settlements, 1994–2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Population Change</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ma'ale Adumim</td>
<td>18,400</td>
<td>28,923</td>
<td>10,523</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modi'in Illit</td>
<td>6,150 ᵃ</td>
<td>27,386</td>
<td>21,236</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betar Illit</td>
<td>4,880</td>
<td>24,895</td>
<td>20,015</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>12,800</td>
<td>16,414</td>
<td>3,614</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giv'at Ze'ev</td>
<td>6,750</td>
<td>10,635</td>
<td>3,885</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efrata</td>
<td>4,650</td>
<td>7,273</td>
<td>2,623</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qiryat Arba</td>
<td>5,120</td>
<td>6,651</td>
<td>1,531</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qame Shomron</td>
<td>4,820</td>
<td>6,170</td>
<td>1,350</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oranit</td>
<td>3,380</td>
<td>5,458</td>
<td>2,078</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfe Menashe</td>
<td>2,710</td>
<td>5,433</td>
<td>2,723</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69,660</td>
<td>139,238</td>
<td>69,578</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bank Total</td>
<td>122,700</td>
<td>234,487</td>
<td>111,787</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 1996.

Ten Fastest Growing West Bank Settlements, 1994–2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Population Change</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modi'in Illit</td>
<td>6,150 ᵃ</td>
<td>27,386</td>
<td>21,236</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betar Illit</td>
<td>4,880</td>
<td>24,895</td>
<td>20,015</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma'ale Adumim</td>
<td>18,400</td>
<td>28,923</td>
<td>10,523</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giv'at Ze'ev</td>
<td>6,750</td>
<td>10,635</td>
<td>3,885</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kokhav Ya'aqv</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>4,389</td>
<td>3,726</td>
<td>562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>12,800</td>
<td>16,414</td>
<td>3,614</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bet El</td>
<td>1,230</td>
<td>4,763</td>
<td>3,533</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfe Menashe</td>
<td>2,710</td>
<td>5,433</td>
<td>2,723</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efrata</td>
<td>4,650</td>
<td>7,273</td>
<td>2,623</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oranit</td>
<td>3,380</td>
<td>5,458</td>
<td>2,078</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61,613</td>
<td>135,569</td>
<td>73,956</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 1996.

Ten Least Populous West Bank Settlements, 1994–2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Population Change</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Niran</td>
<td>67 ᵃ</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>-14</td>
<td>-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bet HaArava</td>
<td>26 ᵇ</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yafit</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>-23</td>
<td>-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ro'i</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>-43</td>
<td>-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mekhora</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>-16</td>
<td>-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemdat</td>
<td>74        ć</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamra</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>-43</td>
<td>-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No'omi</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netiv HaGedud</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>-69</td>
<td>-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negohot</td>
<td>85d</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,160</td>
<td>1,096</td>
<td>-64</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 1996.
b. 2001.
c. 2002.

West Bank Settler Decline, 1994–2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Population Change</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immanu'el</td>
<td>3,360</td>
<td>2,585</td>
<td>-775</td>
<td>-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kfar Eltzion</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>-127</td>
<td>-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paza'el</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>-96</td>
<td>-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massu'a</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>-70</td>
<td>-33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netiv HaGedud</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>-69</td>
<td>-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma'ale Amos</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>-69</td>
<td>-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shave Shomron</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>-67</td>
<td>-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamra</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>-43</td>
<td>-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ro'i</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>-43</td>
<td>-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vered Yeriho</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>-41</td>
<td>-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8,141</td>
<td>6,751</td>
<td>-1,400</td>
<td>-17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 1996.

The largest and most popular settlements, most of which are located in the metropolitan Jerusalem region, have doubled in population over the last decade. The ten largest settlements house 59 percent of the total West Bank settler population of 234,487. Almost half—46 percent—of the settler population live in the five largest settlements. Ariel, at one time the second most populous settlement, has grown far less than the average—28 percent compared to 91 percent—and has now been eclipsed by larger and faster growing settlements catering to the ultra-Orthodox community.

The fastest growing settlements are mostly a mixture of rapidly increasing ultra-Orthodox populations—Beitar Illit, Modi’in Illit, Kochav Ya’acov—smaller, ideological settlements in the West Bank heartland—Bet El, Talmon, and Pene Hever—and established settlements close to the metropolitan areas of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv—Efrata, Oranit, Alfe Menashe, and Ariel.

Nineteen of the 127 settlements in the West Bank for which official population figures are tabulated lost population during the last decade. The population of the ten least populous settlements declined by 5 percent during the 1994–2004 period. Those most affected are located in the Jordan Valley and its environs. Emmanuel, near Ariel, is an ultra-Orthodox settlement that has long had difficulties creating a stable social foundation.
May 5  Kol Ha’Ir reports that residents and business owners of the West Bank town of Bir Nahala want to change the route of the separation barrier, which will cut off the town from Jerusalem.

May 27  Jerusalem’s local planning and construction committee approves the construction of 93 dwelling units in the settlement of Gilo. (Kol Ha’Ir)

May 31  Ha’aretz reports plans by the Jerusalem municipality to demolish 88 homes in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan to establish an archaeological park. The proposed demolitions will render 1,000 Palestinians homeless.

June 2  Israel Radio reports an Israel Land Authority tender for the construction of 22 houses in the West Bank settlement of Ma’ale Adummim near Jerusalem.

June 3  Kol Ha’Ir reports that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have been unable to protect the house of a Palestinian family near the Jewish settlement in Hebron, despite the fact that the Israeli courts ruled that the family should be able to return. Settlers destroyed the home on numerous occasions, and efforts to rebuild it continue.

June 5  Yedioth Aharonot reports that the Israeli military is using an uninhabited villa neighborhood in Giv’at Ze’ev to train troops for the withdrawal from Gaza.

June 6  Talia Sasson, author of a report criticizing “outpost” settlements (see March-April 2005 Report), states that nothing has changed in the three months since she submitted her findings. (Ha’aretz)

June 7  Ha’aretz reports that the Sharon (2001-2004) and Netanyahu (1996–1999) governments transferred $15.5 million to help with the construction of public facilities and infrastructure in unauthorized settlements.

June 10  Ha’aretz reports that 200 olive trees belonging to residents of the Palestinian village of Jinsafut, east of Qalqilya, died from chemical pollutants from the Israeli settlement of Emmanuel.

June 22  The Jerusalem municipality postpones plans to demolish 88 Arab homes in Silwan and claims to be negotiating a compromise with local residents. Lawyer Sami Ershad, a representative of the residents, says demolition orders continue to be issued and denies that a committee to work out a compromise was formed. (Ha’aretz)

June 26  Ma’ariv reports Israeli plans to establish cattle grazing lands in military camps recently evacuated in the northern West Bank and Jordan Valley to prevent Palestinians from using the areas.

The right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel does not mean disregarding the rights of others in the land. The Palestinians will always be our neighbors. We respect them, and have no aspirations to rule over them. They are also entitled to freedom and to a national, sovereign existence in a state of their own.

This week, the last Israeli soldier left the Gaza Strip, and military law there was ended. The State of Israel proved that it is ready to make painful concessions in order to resolve the conflict with the Palestinians.

I am among those who believe that it is possible to reach a fair compromise and coexistence in good neighborly relations between Jews and Arabs. However, I must emphasize one fact: there will be no compromise on the right of the State of Israel to exist as a Jewish state, with defensible borders, in full security and without threats and terror.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon speech to the UN General Assembly, September 15, 2005

June 29  Tens of Israeli youths attack a Palestinian boy with rocks in Gush Katif. A journalist and cameraman from Yediot Aharonot save the boy from bleeding to death. (Yedioth Aharonot)

July 3  Ha’aretz reports that residents of Kufir Aqab and Semiramis, part of the Jerusalem municipality but outside the newly built separation barrier, have not received mail for four years. The locale is considered a “closed area.”

The Israeli High Court reviews the case of three Palestinian villages in East Jerusalem that have petitioned to stay within the separation barrier, and not on the side of the West Bank where they would be located if the current barrier route is enforced. (Ha’aretz)

July 8  Yedioth Aharonot reports that approximately 250,000 Arabs carry a blue Jerusalem identity card signifying residence in the city. Some 130,000 will remain within the separation barrier, while 55,000 will reside beyond it but within the city’s municipal boundaries. The remaining 70,000 reside elsewhere.

Kol Ha’Ir reports that security and police responsibility for the West Bank settlements of Givat Ze’ev, Har Adar, Givon, Har Shmuel, Har Gilo, as well as Bet Iqsa, locat-
ed within the separation barrier, will be transferred to the Jerusalem police.

July 13  Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon orders the Gaza Strip a “closed area” in preparation for the August withdrawal. The area is now closed to Israeli citizens who do not reside in the strip. Two thousand soldiers and police officers are deployed to its borders. (Ha'aretz)

July 14  Palestinians fire approximately 20 Qassams at Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip and nearby Israeli villages. One of them kills a 22-year-old Israeli woman. Hamas claims responsibility. (Ha'aretz)

July 16  Palestinian gunmen fire six Qassam rockets at the Israeli city of Sderot, wounding four people. (Ha'aretz)

July 17  Six Israelis are injured in a mortar attack on the Katif bloc. Qassam rocket attacks on Sderot continue for the fourth day. The IDF assassinates a Hamas member and a member of Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip. (Ha'aretz)

July 20  Israel confiscates 93 dunams of Palestinian agricultural land adjacent to the settlements of Kiryat Arba and Kharsina. The land is to be used for a security buffer zone and a security road for two nearby settlements. (OCHA)

Land leveling for barrier construction continues along the southern section of the Green Line, east of the Shani settlement, al-Ramadin, Immeizil, east and west of the Meitar checkpoint, and on the western side of Idhna. (OCHA)

Thirty thousand demonstrators at Kfar Maimon protest the planned August withdrawal from Gaza and four West Bank settlements. (Yediot Aharonot)

July 21  The IDF continues to level land near Immatin village, Qalqilya, for barrier construction and land northeast of Jayyus village to construct a new road connecting Jayyus with the Falamiya barrier gate. (OCHA)

Israeli contractors continue leveling land for barrier construction north of Saltif and south of Manda village around the settlement of Ariel. (OCHA)

On a visit to Ariel, Sharon calls for expanding the West Bank settlement, promising the residents they will forever be “part of Israel.”

July 23  Two Israelis are shot dead by a Palestinian gunman after they took a detour to avoid a backup at Gaza’s Kissufim checkpoint. (Ha'aretz)

July 25  Yediot Aharonot reports the Local Planning Committee of the Jerusalem Municipality passing the second phase of approval for a plan to construct a Jewish neighborhood in the Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City. The committee follows an earlier recruitment program aimed at attracting 200 couples to the area.

July 27  Israel demolishes three Palestinian houses in al-Hader, near Bethlehem, to clear land for the separation barrier. (OCHA)

July 31  The IDF issues orders to confiscate 90 dunams of Palestinian agricultural land near the Israeli settlement of Pene Hever, Hebron, in order to add a new layer to the security buffer zone and to build a new security road around the settlement. (OCHA)

August 2  Ha'aretz reports that since January 2005, 21 Israelis have been killed and 238 injured in attacks in the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem).

August 3  Construction of the second section of the separation barrier begins near the West Bank city of Qalqilya. The section will be 4 kilometers long and 100 meters wide. Two thousand dunams of Palestinian agricultural land will be confiscated for its construction or will be separated by the barrier. The IDF uproots approximately 400 olive trees and starts leveling land in Qalqilya between Azzun and Kafr Thulth for barrier construction. (OCHA)

August 4  Israel announces a plan to expand the West Bank settlement of Beitar Illit, near Jerusalem, by 75 housing units. There are currently 25,000 residents in the settlement. (AP)

August 5  The Presbyterian Church USA charges five U.S. corporations with contributing to the ongoing Israeli occupation and barrier construction. These companies include ITT Industries and United Technologies, which supply communications equipment and helicopters; Caterpillar, which makes equipment is used for Palestinian home demolitions; and Motorola, which provides wireless communications for the military. (Christian Science Monitor)

The IDF fires teargas, rubber bullets, and shock grenades at demonstrators protesting the separation barrier in Bil’in. Two internationals, one Israeli and two Palestinians are injured. (OCHA)

August 8  A government spokesman reports that 1,018 settler families out of 1,700 families affected by the withdrawal

Sharon is not giving any hope, he is continuing to build the fence, he is expanding the settlements and telling the Palestinians that they have two options: either to die from this life, or to die from the tanks. . . .

Between the years 1996–2000 [Israel] lived in the best security situation ever, and what happened? . . . What did we gain from the quiet? Nothing. That’s what the Palestinians see. If there’s quiet we don’t gain a thing.

On the day after the disengagement, I want the Palestinian who wants to travel to Cairo to be able to get into the car and reach Cairo within five hours, not in 30 years. . . . Peace, security and occupation will never go together. . . . Enough of going around in circles. You have to take the idea of occupation out of your minds. Please, get off our case, get out of our lives.

Interview with Minister of Civil Affairs Mohammad Dahlan, Ha'aretz, July 22, 2005
have already applied for compensation and do not plan to resist. (AP)

**August 9** At a special parliamentary session, Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas urges, “The [Israeli] withdrawal must take place in calm . . . so that we can confirm to the world that we deserve a state and that this step is just the beginning and not the end.” (Reuters)

**August 10** Gen. Yair Naveh, the head of the IDF Central Command, issues an order preventing non-residents from entering the settlements of Ganim and Kedim. Access to two settlements south of Jenin is also prohibited. (Arutz 7)

James Wolfensohn, representing the Quartet, finalizes a deal between the Israelis and Palestinians for the demolition of buildings in the Gaza settlements. According to the plan, Israel will demolish the buildings, remove asbestos and other hazardous materials, and pay $25 million to the World Bank to hire Egyptian and Palestinian firms to clear the rubble. (MidEast Mirror)

**August 11** Approximately 300,000 anti-disengagement activists gather for a mass rally in the main Rabin Square in Tel-Aviv. (Arutz 7)

**August 13** A group of Israeli settlers attack and injure two elderly Palestinians from Ramin village, in Tulkarm. (OCHA)

**August 14** IDF closes the Kissufim entrance to the Gaza Strip, marking the beginning of the withdrawal. The area of the four West Bank settlements slated for withdrawal is declared a closed military zone. (Ha'aretz)

**August 15** Ha'aretz reports that most of the settlers from the northern Gaza settlements of Alei Sinai, Dugit, and Nisanit, have already left the area.

**August 16** The IDF and police begin evacuating Neve Dekalim, the biggest settlement in Gaza. Israeli officials claim that half of the settlers have already evacuated their homes in the Gaza Strip. (Ha'aretz)

A group of settlers from Khomesh enter two houses in the village of Burqa, Nablus, and force the families to leave. The IDF arrives within a few hours and forces the settlers out. (OCHA)

**August 17** The Gaza settlements of Bedolah, Gani Tal, Kerem Atzmona, Morag, and Tel Katifa are evacuated. About half of the families of Neve Dekalim are evacuated.

A settler from Shvut Rahel shoots and kills four Palestinian laborers in the West Bank settlement of Shilo. (Arutz 7)

Approximately 850 families and ten buses filled with settlers leave the Katif bloc. Some 15,000 police and soldiers take part in the operation. (Arutz 7)

The IDF issues four requisition orders for approximately 1,600 dunams of land for barrier construction around the Ma'ale Adumim settlement bloc. (OCHA)

**August 18** Kfar Darom and Shirat HaYam are evacuated. (Arutz 7)

The IDF begins forcibly removing 1,000 youths from the Neve Dekalim synagogue. (Arutz 7)

An IDF soldier is injured by a Qassam rocket fired at the Netzarim settlement. (OCHA)

Israeli youths vandalize a Palestinian gas station in Sanur. (Ha'aretz)

**August 19** The community leader of the East Jerusalem settlement of French Hill calls for a law banning neighboring Arabs from Issawiya from entering the neighborhood. (Yerushalaim)

Jerusalem's local building and construction committee approves the expansion of the East Jerusalem settlement of Nof Zion in Jebel Mukabber. The new plan includes 500 housing units and a 150 room hotel. (Yerushalaim)

**August 20** Sharon authorizes the transfer of Jerusalem's district police station the E1 area east of the city. (Arutz 7)

**August 21** An IDF soldier is wounded by Palestinian gunmen who opened fire on his post near the the Neve Dekalim settlement. (OCHA)

An Israeli settler opens fire and wound a Palestinian farmer working in his field near the main road between Habla and Qalqilya. (OCHA)

**August 22** The IDF evacuates Netzarim, concluding the withdrawal from Gaza. (Arutz 7)

Netzarim residents will temporarily reside at the College of Judea and Samaria in Ariel and plan to establish a new town by the same name in the Negev. (Arutz 7)

The IDF levels Palestinian agricultural land from H2, Hebron, in the area near the Kiriya Arba and Kharsina settlements. (OCHA)

**August 23** Evacuation of the settlements of Sanur and Khomesh in the northern West Bank begins and ends. (Ha'aretz)

Yerushalaim reports that 300 hundred Katif bloc families that arrived in Jerusalem after the Gaza withdrawal have been offered apartments in new developments in the settlements of Har Homa and Ma'ale Adumim. (Yerushalaim)

**August 26** An Israeli official reports that the population of West Bank settlements excluding East Jerusalem grew by 12,800 from June 2004 to July 2005, reaching 246,000. (Ha’aretz)

**August 28** Uzi Benziman reports in Ha’aretz that 212 families from the Gaza Strip have moved to settlements in the West Bank. Some have chosen to live there, while others are staying temporarily.

Settler youths and the Israeli army block the Israeli organization Peace Now from reaching the Migron and Hersha settlement outposts. The IDF claims the area is a closed military area.

**August 30** Eighty percent of residents of Hebron region settlement Tene/Oranim, which is slated to be outside of the separation barrier, sign a letter to Prime Minister Sharon requesting to be evacuated. They want compensation equal to those settlements evacuated from Gaza.

**September 6** IDF snipers stop a crowd of several hundred Palestinian teenagers and children marching on the Katif bloc from the area of Khan Yunis.

**September 7** Israel reaches an agreement with Egypt on control of the Philadelphi corridor along the Gaza-Egypt border.

The last Israeli civilians leave the Gaza Strip after completing the transfer of greenhouses to communities in the Negev.

**September 8** Israel closes the Rafah border to allow Palestinian and Egyptian security forces to deploy along the Philadelphi route. (Ha’aretz)
from the year-long debate about the Gaza settlements’ future. According to a poll conducted by The New Wave released on Channel 10 days before the August evacuation, only about a third of those polled even knew where Gush Katif was located. It is difficult to create a national trauma over the evacuation of places that most Israelis cannot find on a map.

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

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

Israel’s withdrawal from Sinai in 1982 challenged this strategy, just as Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 seemed to confirm it. Under certain circumstances Israeli policymakers believed that Israeli security could be enhanced by withdrawal and evacuating settlements.

More recently, Sharon, prompted by a potent combination of increasing human and political costs, determined that settlements in Gaza had become a security liability, whatever the risks posed by withdrawal.

4. The settler lobby is not all powerful.

At the height of the Oslo process, a prominent leader of the settler movement warned a high ranking Palestinian official that no Israeli policy toward the settlements could be adopted without settler support. This political axiom, which was adopted, by choice or fear, by a generation of political leaders from Israel’s ruling parties, has now been undermined. Although political opposition to the Gaza disengagement plan was highest in the ruling Likud Party, popular opposition failed to resonate beyond a minority in the Orthodox religious right-wing. The rulings, warnings, and curses of the rabbis against those who would “expel Jews” were ignored by most Israelis. “There is sympathy for the settlers,” wrote one columnist during the summer protests, “but the football game on TV was more important.”

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

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

In a five minute televised address on the eve of Gaza’s evacuation, however, Sharon sang a different tune.

“We cannot hold onto Gaza forever. More than 1 million Palestinians live there and double their number with each generation. They live in uniquely crowded conditions in refugee camps, in poverty and despair, in hotbeds of rising hatred with no hope on the horizon.”

It was not a newfound concern about the demographic contest, which has been an inescapable part of the Israeli/Palestinian landscape for more than one century, that forced upon policymakers like Sharon and Rabin the realization that Israel could not remain in direct occupation of Gaza permanently, but rather Palestinian rebellion that dawned in December 1987 and continued in Gaza for most of the subsequent 18 years. There was no single event, no particular strategy of revolt—knife attacks in Jaffa markets, Qassam firings into Sderot and the Katif bloc, bombings of military convoys moving out of Netzarim or Philadelphia, or suicide bombings in Tel Aviv—that tipped the balance in favor of withdrawal. But only in the context of this broad Palestinian revolt was the self-evident “demographic threat” able to gain political currency in Israel.

6. Is the Gaza withdrawal a prelude to additional evacuations in the other territories conquered in June 1967?

Not necessarily. The retreat from Gaza has placed Israel’s occupation squarely within a broader historical experience. When costs outweigh benefits, nations, usually after exhausting all other possibilities, are compelled to do as the balance of forces dictates. It was not easy for Israel’s leadership to reconsider the value of long-held polices that tied Israeli security to the fate of its settlements in Gaza, but persistent Palestinian opposition to the status quo left them little choice.

Israeli policymakers have yet to solve the crisis caused by Palestinian opposition to Israeli plans to dominate and settle the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Since 1967, Israel, with the international community in tow, has implemented an array of policies meant to keep the the fruits of its 1967 victory at manageable cost. The Oslo accords and the separation barrier now being constructed in the West Bank are two of the more recent examples of this ongoing effort to give Israel both security and settlements. The retreat from Gaza suggests a different outcome.
There is no point or hope to the settlement project in the occupied territories. It is doomed to failure. There is a built-in contradiction between Israel’s Zionist concept and moral pretense, and the way it has forced itself on the Palestinians. Even the obtuseness of 38 years finally comes to an end and even the prolonged, forcible rule over another nation ultimately surrenders to that nation’s wishes of independence and to the terror-war that it is waging.

As the United States and Soviet Union forced Israel to withdraw from Sinai and the Gaza Strip in March 1957, thus the world of the 21st century will not permit it to continue for long to hold on to the territories it occupied in ‘67. Demographic reality will have a similar effect. Some 250,000 settlers in the West Bank are only 10 percent of its general population and this proportion will dictate the outcome. Despite the huge effort and gargantuan investments, Israel has failed to concentrate a critical mass of Jewish residents in the territories. The major part of its population has chosen to live within the Green Line.

Most important, Israel’s consciousness has changed. The intoxication of victory has been replaced by sobering reality. The greed for territory has been replaced by the yearning for normality. The military arrogance has been replaced by conscience pangs in view of the Palestinians’ suffering.

Perhaps in the future the behavior of our Arab neighbors will again create an Israeli consensus regarding the continued occupation of the territories, but not for settlement purposes, only for security needs of border bargaining. The evacuation of Gaza is a guiding precedent.

“The Gaza Pullout as a Guiding Precedent,”
Uzi Benziman, Ha’aretz, September 9, 2005

| Top Ten West Bank Settlements (Percent Growth), 1994–2004 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Name            | Population 1994 | Population 2004 |
| Revava          | 108             | 738             |
| Kochav Ya’acov  | 663             | 4,389           |
| Gev’a Binyamin  | 361             | 2,032           |
| Betar Illit     | 4,880           | 24,895          |
| Avne Hefetz     | 214             | 1,038           |
| Modi’in Illit   | 6,150 a         | 27,386          |
| Talmon          | 439             | 1,760           |
| Bet El          | 1,230           | 4,763           |
| Pene Hever      | 98              | 377             |
| Qedar           | 198             | 658             |
| Total           | 8,191           | 68,036          |

| Population Change |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| Number 1994       | 630             |
| %                 | 583             |
| Number 2004       | 3,726           |
| %                 | 562             |
| 1,671             |
| 463               |
| 20,015            |
| 410               |
| 824               |
| 385               |
| 21,236            |
| 345               |
| 1,321             |
| 301               |
| 3,533             |
| 287               |
| 279               |
| 285               |
| 460               |
| 232               |
| 53,695            |
| 655               |

a. 1996.