

REPORT ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENT IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

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LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S RETREAT FROM GAZA

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

The withdrawal, wrote Yehoshua Porath, an Israeli scholar who has written widely on Palestinian nationalism, "was foreseeable and could have been predicted from the very first moment when Israel commenced its folly of building settlements in the Gaza Strip. . . . Even if Israel had millions of reserve inhabitants and were ready and able to settle there and to transform Gaza's national character into Jewish-Israeli, there would have been no room for them, either physically or 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 principally from the realization that this situation could not be maintained forever."

To say that the failure of Israel's occupation was inevitable, however, does not answer questions critical to understanding the circumstances that compelled Israel to acknowledge it as such. If the collapse of occupation in Gaza was preordained, why didn't Israel evacuate in 1970, 1980, 1994, or 2003? 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 regarding 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 permanent. Settlement facts on the ground, in and of themselves, do not assure permanent Israeli control over territory or even establish the basis for a secure and permanent Israeli-Jewish presence.

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

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

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

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

In Israel, the depth of popular alienation from the settlement enterprise in Gaza, and the limited social base of its supporters, became clear during the failed campaign led by settlement and rabbinic leaders to stop the evacuation. Indeed, most Israelis were "disengaged"

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Also in this issue:

Settlement Population Data 3
Settlement Time Line 4–6

LESSONS, continued on page 7

TO OUR READERS

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.

Philip C. Wilcox, Jr.

The Messiah Skips Disengagement



Ha'aretz, August 15, 2005

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SETTLEMENT POPULATION DATA

Ten Most Populous West Bank Settlements, 1994–2004

Name	Population		Population Change	
	1994	2004	Number	%
Ma'ale Adumim	18,400	28,923	10,523	57
Modi'in Illit	6,150 ^a	27,386	21,236	345
Betar Illit	4,880	24,895	20,015	410
Ariel	12,800	16,414	3,614	28
Giv'at Ze'ev	6,750	10,635	3,885	58
Efrata	4,650	7,273	2,623	56
Qiryat Arba	5,120	6,651	1,531	30
Qarne Shomron	4,820	6,170	1,350	28
Oranit	3,380	5,458	2,078	61
Alfe Menashe	2,710	5,433	2,723	100
Total	69,660	139,238	69,578	100
West Bank Total	122,700	234,487	111,787	91

a. 1996.

Source: Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, "Population in Localities, 1994, Demographic Characteristics, by Geographical Divisions (S.P. 1026);" "Israel in Numbers 2004."

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.

Ten Least Populous West Bank Settlements, 1994–2004

Name	Population		Population Change	
	1994	2004	Number	%
Niran	67 ^a	53	-14	-21
Bet HaArava	26 ^b	69	43	165
Yafit	124	101	-23	-19
Ro'i	158	115	-43	-27
Mekhora	135	119	-16	-12
Hemdat	74 ^c	120	46	62
Hamra	168	125	-43	-26
No'omi	122	127	5	4
Netiv HaGedud	201	132	-69	-34
Negohot	85 ^d	135	50	59
Total	1,160	1,096	-64	-6

a. 1996.

b. 2001.

c. 2002.

Source: Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, "Population in Localities, 1994, Demographic Characteristics, by Geographical Divisions (S.P. 1026);" "Israel in Numbers 2004."

Ten Fastest Growing West Bank Settlements, 1994–2004

Name	Population		Population Change	
	1994	2004	Number	%
Modi'in Illit	6,150 ^a	27,386	21,236	345
Betar Illit	4,880	24,895	20,015	410
Ma'ale Adumim	18,400	28,923	10,523	57
Giv'at Ze'ev	6,750	10,635	3,885	58
Kokhav Ya'aqov	663	4,389	3,726	562
Ariel	12,800	16,414	3,614	28
Bet El	1,230	4,763	3,533	287
Alfe Menashe	2,710	5,433	2,723	100
Efrata	4,650	7,273	2,623	56
Oranit	3,380	5,458	2,078	61
Total	61,613	135,569	73,956	120

a. 1996.

Source: Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, "Population in Localities, 1994, Demographic Characteristics, by Geographical Divisions (S.P. 1026);" "Israel in Numbers 2004."

The fastest growing settlements are mostly a mixture of rapidly increasing ultra-Orthodox populations—Beitar Illit, Modi'in Illit, Kochav Ya'aqov—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.

West Bank Settler Decline, 1994–2004

Name	Population		Population Change	
	1994	2004	Number	%
Immanu'el	3,360	2,585	-775	-23
Kfar Etzion	543	416	-127	-23
Paza'el	311	215	-96	-31
Massu'a	210	140	-70	-33
Netiv HaGedud	201	132	-69	-34
Ma'ale Amos	388	319	-69	-18
Shave Shomron	606	539	-67	-11
Hamra	168	125	-43	-26
Ro'i	158	115	-43	-27
Vered Yeriho	202	161	-41	-20
Total	8,141	6,751	-1,400	-17

a. 1996.

Source: Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, "Population in Localities, 1994, Demographic Characteristics, by Geographical Divisions (S.P. 1026);" "Israel in Numbers 2004."

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.

SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

May 5 *Kol Ha'ir* reports that residents and business owners of the West Bank town of Bir Nabala 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 archeological 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 *Yediot 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*)

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 Ershied, 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*)

Ma'ariv reports the Israeli government offering a subsidy of up to \$4,000 to Israeli Jews who purchase apartments in Jerusalem between June 5 and October 31, 2005.

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

Ha'aretz reports that in a presentation before the Israeli High Court on the legitimacy of the separation barrier under construction in East Jerusalem, the Sharon government stated for the first time that the barrier's route is influenced not only by security considerations, but also by political/national considerations.

June 24 Two Israeli teenagers from the set-

tlements of Beit Haggai and Otniel are killed and three wounded by gunmen in an attack on a bypass road near Beit Haggai. (*Arutz 7*)

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.

Clashes between Israeli soldiers and settlers result in injury to 10 soldiers and 10 settlers as the soldiers demolished 11 abandoned buildings in Gush Katif. (*Ma'ariv*)

The organization "Man, Nature and Justice" submits a petition to the Israeli High Court to prevent the construction of a dump in the West Bank Abu Shusha quarry between Kedumim settlement and Nablus. The plan includes disposing 10,000 tons of garbage from Israel in the newly constructed landfill. (*Ha'aretz*)

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. (*Yediot Aharonot*)

July 3 *Ha'aretz* reports that residents of Kufr 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 *Yediot 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-

SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

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, Imneizil, 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 Falameya barrier gate. (OCHA)

Israeli contractors continue leveling land for barrier construction north of Salfit 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

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

amended the plan and reduced the number of residential units to be built from 30 to 21.

July 26 *Ha’aretz* reports that Israel’s social-economic cabinet has committed to spending \$490,000 in financial incentives to attract new settlers to the Jordan Valley. Recently released soldiers who commit to living there for four years will receive a grant covering college tuition, a subsistence allowance, and free rent. The decision to entice another 50 settler couples to the Jordan Val-

ley 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 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

TIME LINE, continued on page 6

SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

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 Kadim. 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 wounds 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 Kiryat 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.

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 Hershah 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 Philadelphi, or suicide bombings in Tel Aviv—that tipped the balance in favor of withdrawal. But only in the context of this broad Palestinian revolt was the self-evident "demographic threat" able to gain political currency in Israel.

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 pre-tense, 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		Population Change	
	1994	2004	Number	%
Revava	108	738	630	583
Kochav Ya'acov	663	4,389	3,726	562
Gev'a Binyamin	361	2,032	1,671	463
Betar Illit	4,880	24,895	20,015	410
Avne Hefetz	214	1,038	824	385
Modi'in Illit	6,150 ^a	27,386	21,236	345
Talmon	439	1,760	1,321	301
Bet El	1,230	4,763	3,533	287
Pene Hever	98	377	279	285
Qedar	198	658	460	232
Total	8,191	68,036	53,695	655

a. 1996.

Source: Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, "Population in Localities, 1994, Demographic Characteristics, by Geographical Divisions (S.P. 1026);" "Israel in Numbers 2004."

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