

**DISENGAGEMENT AND ITS DISCONTENTS:  
WHAT WILL THE ISRAELI SETTLERS DO?**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>I. THE DISENGAGEMENT PLAN .....</b>	<b>1</b>
A. WHICH SETTLEMENTS? .....	1
B. THE COMPENSATION PACKAGE.....	2
C. THE EVACUATION OPERATION.....	3
<b>II. MAPPING THE SETTLER COMMUNITY.....</b>	<b>4</b>
A. ECONOMIC SETTLERS.....	5
B. IDEOLOGICAL SETTLERS .....	6
1. Origins of the national-religious movement .....	6
2. The moderate wing .....	7
3. The hard-line wing.....	9
4. The post-Zionist extremists .....	9
<b>III. CAMPAIGNING AGAINST DISENGAGEMENT .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>IV. CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
A. MAP OF ISRAEL .....	19
B. MAP OF WEST BANK .....	20

## DISENGAGEMENT AND ITS DISCONTENTS: WHAT WILL THE ISRAELI SETTLERS DO?

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Scheduled for 15 August 2005, Israel's disengagement from Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank has already begun. How Israel for the first time evacuates settlements in the Palestinian Occupied Territories will have profound implications for Israeli-Palestinian relations, but also for Israeli society. Regardless of one's assessment of the settlers and their enterprise -- regarded internationally as illegal, by many Israelis as irresponsible and by others as the embodiment of the Zionist project -- it is bound to be a traumatic event for Israel. If it should be mishandled, accompanied by violent settler resistance or Palestinian attacks, the prospects for subsequent peace would be much bleaker. The international community's interest is to press for complete disengagement and then a credible follow-on political process.

That the disengagement plan has been initiated and propelled virtually single-handedly by Ariel Sharon, dubbed by many the father of their movement, has made it all the more distressing to the settlers and all the more difficult to combat. Beyond the erosion of their support within Israeli society at large, settlers have suffered from sharpening internal differences, based on generation, worldview, and territorial location. A minority is determined to resist any evacuation, including forcibly, seeing it as a betrayal of faith and a threat to the legitimacy of Zionism. But even among the majority who consider the battle for Gaza lost, tensions exist between those who believe a traumatic, violent evacuation would lessen the prospect of further withdrawals and those who believe it would further alienate the public. Less pragmatic elements, in particular young settlers who evince little loyalty for either the state or the institutions of their elders, are setting the tone, intimidating the more moderate and engaging in disruptive activities, such as blocking highways and encouraging soldiers to disregard disengagement-related orders.

As the mid-August onset of the disengagement plan approaches, and with the defeat of parliamentary and judicial efforts to thwart it, fears have increased that

they may resort to more desperate tactics, such as violence against Palestinians (as already witnessed in the attempted killing of a Palestinian youth in late June) in the hope of provoking violence in return, an attempt to blow up Muslim holy sites, or an attempt on the life of Ariel Sharon, who has certainly taken personal as well as political risks in bringing the process this far.

This background report describes the disengagement plan, maps out the settler constituencies that are bracing for it, and assesses the resistance scenarios being contemplated. Several conclusions emerge, based on the assumption -- now shared by a large majority of disengagement opponents and settlers -- that the plan will go through, no matter the scope of last-minute efforts to derail it.

- *The tone is being set by ideological settlers in general and extremist elements in particular, though most settlers can be characterised as moderate or pragmatic, in particular so-called economic settlers who live in large settlement blocs abutting the Green Line and do not fear eventual evacuation. With the Yesha Council -- the institution representing most settlers -- either unwilling or unable to rein in their activities, the likelihood is high of a difficult, possibly drawn-out affair; some bloodshed is likely, though violence will probably be sporadic and localised. Divisions within the settler community, the absence of a coordinated strategy, and the marginalisation of the radicalised hilltop youth, exacerbate the perils.*
- *The key to a relatively smooth withdrawal lies in drawing a wedge between various strands of the settler movement, in particular distinguishing between those infiltrating the settlements in order to stir disorder, and long-time residents. The government and security forces need to treat the latter with as much dignity as possible and the former with as much firmness as required. Although there are many reasons to criticise the*

performance of the Yesha Council leaders in this period, it is important for the authorities to work with the relatively mainstream settler establishment on relocation and housing to prevent the emergence of a vacuum likely to be filled by more radical figures from the charismatic militant right. Some suggest dialogue should be between settlers and symbols of the state they mostly respect -- police, army, and president -- rather than politicians who lack legitimacy in their eyes.

- *At the end of the day, the battle over Gaza does not chiefly concern Gaza, but rather what comes next.* The various actors -- Sharon, the settlers, the Palestinian Authority and militant Palestinian groups -- will gauge how to act based on what scenario (more or less traumatic, more or less confrontational) best fits their vision for the future. The international community, led by the Quartet, ought to have one priority: to ensure that disengagement is complete and is followed by a credible political process leading to far more substantive territorial withdrawals and settlement evacuation, an end to the armed confrontation and the reining in of militant Palestinian groups. It should press both the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government to curb any attacks accompanying the disengagement and then to engage in a genuine political process after it is conducted.

**Amman/Brussels, 7 July 2005**

## DISENGAGEMENT AND ITS DISCONTENTS: WHAT WILL THE ISRAELI SETTLERS DO?

### I. THE DISENGAGEMENT PLAN

On several past occasions, Israel has withdrawn from captured or occupied land. Its withdrawal from the Sinai in the early 1980's entailed the removal of civilian settlements and 6,000 settlers but the pullout was part of a negotiated peace deal, the relatively short duration of the occupation meant that roots had not been firmly established, and opposition to evacuation consequently was muted. The 2000 withdrawal from Lebanon involved military positions and encampments only. And the various Israeli military redeployments from Palestinian territories pursuant to the Oslo accords never affected any settlement. For this reason, the forthcoming disengagement is unprecedented, as is the intensity of domestic opposition to it.

Under the unilateral disengagement plan, Israel will withdraw its military and civilian presence from seventeen Gaza Strip settlements and four West Bank (Samaria) communities.<sup>1</sup> Its stated purpose is to achieve a redeployment of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) "along new security lines and a change in the deployment of settlements, which will reduce as much as possible the number of Israelis located in the heart of the Palestinian population".<sup>2</sup> All in all, approximately 8,000 long-term residents of these settlements are slated for evacuation as well as 700 new settlers, who have moved since passage of the plan to express solidarity with the longer-term settlers and/or block the evacuation.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All population statistics are drawn from "Peace Now population statistics, 2000-2004", Peace Now, Israel.

<sup>2</sup> Text of speech by Prime Minister Sharon, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches+by+Israeli+leaders/2003/Address+by+PM+Ariel+Sharon+at+the+Fourth+Herzliya.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> In Gaza, 93 new settlers have moved to Netzarim, 78 to Benei-Atzmon, 68 to Kfar Darom, 73 to new neighbourhoods in Gush Katif, and the rest to other settlements. Doron Shefer, "Population Administration: 146 Evacuees have left, 700 came", *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 23 June 2005.

### A. WHICH SETTLEMENTS?

The largest settlement area to be evacuated is Gush Katif, located in the southern Gaza Strip, which comprises fifteen separate settlements and some 3,800 settlers. Most communities in the bloc are primarily of a religious orientation, some are mixed (religious and secular), and a handful are strictly secular.<sup>4</sup> While a majority of these settlements are relatively small, Neveh Dekalim houses some 2,700 people and serves as the bloc's cultural centre. Most Gush Katif settlements were established between the late 1970's and the mid 1980's, although in the last several years, young, more radical settlers from the West Bank established new outposts such as Shirat HaYam and Kerem Atzmona.

The three northern Gaza Strip settlements, Elei Sinai, Dugit and Nissanit, have an estimated combined population of 1,550. Elei Sinai and Dugit (with populations of, respectively, 407 and 1,065) were founded in 1983 and 1984 following Israel's withdrawal from Sinai; they are on the Mediterranean coast and include for the most part secular settlers who were attracted to state-provided economic benefits.<sup>5</sup>

Outside Gush Katif, in the central and southern parts of Gaza, Netzarim, Kfar Darom and Morag contain the most radical, religiously-motivated settlers. Established in 1970, Kfar Darom, with a population of roughly 500, is the oldest settlement in Gaza. Netzarim, which was established in 1984 as an orthodox kibbutz (cooperative agricultural settlement), has a population of 495, while 221 settlers inhabit Morag, a religious agricultural community.

In the heart of the northern West Bank, four relatively isolated and small settlements -- Ganim, Kadim, Sa-Nur and Homesh -- are also slated for evacuation. According to an official publication, their removal is intended to

<sup>4</sup> For a description of these categories, see below, Section II.

<sup>5</sup> Nissanit is a mixed religious-secular community. "Profile, Communities in the Gaza Coastal Region", the Yesha Council, <http://www.moetzetyesha.co.il>.

"enable territorial contiguity for Palestinians in the Northern Samaria area".<sup>6</sup> Established in the early 1980's, their population amounts to roughly 675. Ganim and Kadim are inhabited mainly by economically-motivated secular settlers, while Sa-Nur and Homesh are mixed communities whose share of religious families has been growing.

## **B. THE COMPENSATION PACKAGE**

The Evacuation-Compensation Bill approved in February 2005 establishes a complex system of financial reimbursements for land, property and livelihood for settlers evacuated as a result of the disengagement plan. Compensation is determined in accordance with the size of the family, plot of land and housing, as well as length of residence. According to this scheme, families are eligible for a package ranging from \$100,000 to \$270,000,<sup>7</sup> with additional grants covering moving costs (\$2,100 to \$4,200), up to six months rent (\$415 to \$520 per month), a \$30,000 resettlement bonus for those willing to move to priority development areas in the Galilee and Negev, as well as additional monies for the re-establishment of evacuated agricultural enterprises.<sup>8</sup>

To encourage voluntary departure, receipt of the full compensation package is dependent on agreement by the settler to leave prior to the onset of the evacuation. Prime Minister Sharon also ordered an intensive effort to build infrastructure necessary for relocation to the Nitzanim coastal region eighteen kilometres

north of Gaza (currently a nature preserve) and offered settlers the prospect of relocating en bloc to this community.<sup>9</sup> By requiring settler communities to choose this option prior to disengagement, the government hopes to increase its appeal, foment divisions among settlers, and dilute the resistance of the most defiant among them.

This approach has yielded mixed results. For the most part settlers appear in little hurry to leave, out of hope that the disengagement somehow will not take place, out of confidence that they will not forfeit their benefits even if they depart later, and out of conviction that brinkmanship ultimately may result in more generous benefit offers. The gamble seems to be paying off. The government has put increasingly attractive proposals on the table to maximise voluntary evacuees and minimize the security and political risks of a messy evacuation.<sup>10</sup> According to a retired senior police officer, this pattern reflects a "mixture of greed and inept bureaucracy. The settlers have nothing to gain by cutting a deal. They will either stay where they are [if their opposition succeeds] or they will get higher compensation".<sup>11</sup>

The administrative office handling disengagement issues had hoped that somewhere between half and 80 per cent of the settlers would leave voluntarily ahead of the mid-August 2005 deadline. As of early July, the numbers have been much lower. Only 264 families had signed up for compensation by late June.<sup>12</sup> 430

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<sup>6</sup> "The Cabinet Resolution Regarding the Disengagement Plan", Prime Minister's Office, 6 June 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Nina Gilbert, "Knesset passes historic pullout bill", *The Jerusalem Post*, 17 February 2005.

<sup>8</sup> The compensation for those evacuated from the Sinai settlement of Yamit in 1982 was far higher, amounting to a lump sum of roughly \$500,000 per family (just over \$1 million in 2005 terms). But while cash disbursements today are significantly lower, they are supplemented by assistance for relocation, job searches, unemployment benefits, financial advice and early retirement offers. The total cost of the plan is estimated at about NIS 7 billion (\$1.6 billion), an amount that does not include the cost of providing agricultural land within Israel to replace land in Gaza. In addition, a 10 June 2005 Supreme Court decision will result in even higher compensation. It rejected a clause which would have barred compensation beneficiaries from filing civil claims for damages against the state; rejected a deadline giving settlers 30 days to choose their preferred compensation plan; and ruled that settlers under 21 may receive compensation, and the evacuation day rather than 4 June 2004 is to be used as the benchmark for calculating the compensation package (e.g., length of residence in a settlement). All figures denoted in dollars (\$) in this report are in U.S. dollars.

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<sup>9</sup> The Israeli Cabinet approved the Nitzanim plan on 26 June 2005.

<sup>10</sup> As a source "close to the [Nitzanim] project" acknowledged, Sharon "very much wants the evacuation to be voluntary and is ready to 'sacrifice a lot'" to achieve that goal. Yuval Yoaz, Haaretz, 14 April 2005. A former head of the Jewish Division of the General Security Service (GSS) noted that providing adequate housing assistance was essential to legitimise the disengagement process. Crisis Group interview with Hezi Kalo, Tel Aviv, 28 June 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Crisis Group interview with Alik Ron, former commander of the Israeli police in the territories, Bnei Brak, 26 May 2005. Some settlers believe Sharon intended from the outset to offer a higher compensation package and "deliberately offered small amounts" in order to later increase the sums and divide the settlers. Crisis Group interview with Ayala Azran, Neveh Dekalim resident, Neveh Dekalim, 21 March 2005. According to this view, Sharon was playing it tough at the time Knesset approval of the plan was sought but is now seeking to capture the moral high-ground with a more generous offer.

<sup>12</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview with Haim Haltman, spokesperson for SELA (Assistance to Settlers in Gaza and Northern West Bank) Administration, one of the institutions established by the Evacuation and Compensation Bill, Tel

families had subscribed to the Nitzanim deal, with a few hundred others having expressed an interest through their lawyers.<sup>13</sup> Most settlers have in effect been shunning the evacuation administration as a matter of principle and a source of pride.<sup>14</sup> The application cut-off date has been extended and, as it now stands, anyone agreeing to voluntary evacuation, up to and including on evacuation day, will be eligible for the basic compensation package for lost land and property.<sup>15</sup>

### C. THE EVACUATION OPERATION

Initially scheduled for 25 July 2005, the evacuation operation was moved to 15 August both in order to develop further resettlement options and to accommodate religious sensitivities.<sup>16</sup> On that day, the period of voluntary evacuation will end, and the compulsory withdrawal process, estimated to last four weeks, will begin. The government had planned to declare areas to be evacuated closed military zones some time prior to that day, thereby prohibiting entry to non-residents,<sup>17</sup> but had hoped to postpone this as long as possible in order to "create a more relaxed atmosphere and help entice settlers to accept compensation and leave on their own".<sup>18</sup> In an indication of the intensity of settler resistance, of concern over a major influx of anti-disengagement activists and of increased clashes opposing settlers, the army and Palestinians, on 30 June

the IDF declared Gaza a closed military zone for 24 hours, in effect a practice run for disengagement proper.<sup>19</sup>

The forcible evacuation is expected to involve roughly 7,000 police officers and 25,000 soldiers and cost some \$330 million.<sup>20</sup> Added to this will be expenditures required for the demolition of settler homes and communal buildings, a decision reached together with the Palestinian Authority, which wishes to make room for higher-density housing.

According to the plan, seven concentric buffer zones will be established around all evacuation areas. The inner circle is to include teams of unarmed soldiers and police charged with the evacuation itself. The second circle will contain armed soldiers and police charged with surrounding and isolating the settlements, providing immediate protection for those conducting the evacuation. The third zone, encroaching on swathes of land under Palestinian control, will be under curfew in order to minimize the risk of mortar or other Palestinian attacks against evacuees or soldiers. In the event of a flare-up, a fourth circle can come into action as an offensive force. Within the fifth and sixth circles, police and soldiers will seek to prevent infiltration by anti-disengagement Israelis living outside the areas. Finally, the outermost zone will see enhanced policing in urban areas and transport routes in Israel proper, covering much of the country in order to tackle disruptive anti-disengagement activities.<sup>21</sup>

Although the issue continues to be debated by officials, the first phase reportedly will involve simultaneous removal of the more hard-line Northern Gaza and Netzarim settlements, in an effort to deflate settler resistance. Neveh Dekalim and Kfar Darom would be evacuated next and the northern West Bank settlements last.<sup>22</sup>

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Aviv, 23 June 2005. These figures were submitted to the Knesset Finance Committee on 21 June 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Yuval Yoaz, "Hundreds more Gaza families may move to Nitzanim", *Haaretz*, 22 June 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Crisis Group interview with Ayala Azran, Neveh Dekalim, 23 June 2005. Prominent Yesha councilors Israel Harel and Adi Mintz told Crisis Group of their surprise at the level of the Gaza settlers' determination. Crisis Group interviews, 21 June and 27 June 2005.

<sup>15</sup> However, settlers who do not fully register by 31 July 2005 will forfeit secondary benefits such as grants, unemployment and rent subsidies and other forms of assistance.

<sup>16</sup> The evacuation originally was scheduled to take place during the traditional three-week mourning period preceding Tisha Be'Av, which commemorates the destruction of the first and second Temples and during which religious Jews customarily do not move to new houses. It was considered particularly insensitive to schedule the evacuation during a period that focuses on the forced exile of the Jewish people.

<sup>17</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview with Amos Harel, *Haaretz* military affairs correspondent, 22 June 2005. As far as punishment for illegal entry is concerned, "the government has been inconclusive about this, but they have said that anyone attempting to enter illegally will be arrested and detained until after the disengagement if it is deemed necessary, and further charges might be brought... such as attempting to bring in weapons, explosives etc".

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>19</sup> *Haaretz*, 30 June 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Arie O'Sullivan, "This way out", *The Jerusalem Post*, 31 March 2005.

<sup>21</sup> See *Haaretz*, 6 June 2005 and *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 12 June 2005. Officially, the evacuation will be undertaken by the police, who are empowered to arrest demonstrators, with the assistance of the IDF. Female police officers, supported by their IDF counterparts (due to a shortage of the former), will evacuate female settlers. However, the IDF will control the overall operation. Crisis Group interview with Ron Shatzberg, reserve officer involved in a dialogue with Gush Katif settlers, Tel Aviv, 23 February 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview with Amos Harel, *op. cit.* In opting for an impressive show of force from the outset of the operation, the IDF is seeking "to create the impression

Though clearly difficult, from a purely technical/security standpoint the evacuation of settlers may well prove the least dangerous task. The Gaza Strip is comparatively easy to police as it already is surrounded by a security fence with entry possible only via controlled crossing points. Although the four West Bank settlements are more accessible to demonstrators, in principle they can be wholly cordoned off, and the separation barrier already divides them from Israel proper. Two settlements (Ganim and Kadim) effectively have acquiesced in the evacuation, and images of families leaving them were televised in early June. The IDF assumed that the four small West Bank communities would display less resistance.

That said, opponents of the plan have begun moving to a tent compound in the area. The most prominent among them is Knesset member Arieh Eldad, who issued a rousing call for Sa-Nur to become the "Stalingrad of Samaria".<sup>23</sup> The greatest peril, in other words, may emanate from outsiders -- though early declaration of a military zone may thwart the plans, settler leaders have threatened to flood Gaza with up to 100,000 sympathisers -- and from more remote areas, where civil disobedience could immobilise significant elements of the security force. It may also come from more radical forms of resistance, including violence targeting Palestinians or Israeli officials.

## II. MAPPING THE SETTLER COMMUNITY

All settlers share a fundamental characteristic, in that they have chosen to live in territories occupied by Israel during the 1967 war, often at the instigation of and with material inducements by successive governments, both Left and Right, which considered holding more land essential to the nation's security.<sup>24</sup> Beyond that, they are individuals with highly differing political views and religious backgrounds and, it follows, very different reactions to the disengagement plan.

The most powerful settler body is Yesha,<sup>25</sup> the Council of Jewish Settlements of Judea, Samaria and Gaza District. Created in 1980, it serves as a representative in dealings between settlers and the authorities and also in regard to internal matters. Each settlement elects two representatives though the Council in reality is run by a secretariat that draws together heads of regional councils and key office holders. Over the years, Yesha's influence has waxed and waned, and the disengagement plan has strained its leadership capacity. Clearly, many of the most radical settlers do not feel it represents their interests.

The settlers evade easy classification, as variables such as geographic location, age and intensity of religious feeling each play an important part. As the Yesha Council spokesperson explained:

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of a strong and determined effort to help prevent any concerted effort at resistance".

<sup>23</sup> Nadav Shragai, *Haaretz*, 15 June 2005.

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<sup>24</sup> Virtually unanimously, the international community considers the settlements to be a violation of Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which states: "the Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies". [www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/genevaconvention](http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/genevaconvention). This position has been upheld in various UN resolutions that declare Israeli settlement activity to be illegal and call for its cessation. Hague Regulations 42 to 56 also prohibit the occupying power from undertaking permanent changes in occupied areas. "The legal status of Israeli settlements under IHL: Policy brief", *Reliefweb*, January 2004. Israel disputes this characterisation and the applicability of the Geneva Convention to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, "land which was not under the legitimate sovereignty of any state", and where there were Jewish settlements before 1948, legitimated by the League of Nations and the UN Mandate for Palestine. "Israeli settlements and international law: Legal position paper", Government of Israel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Policy Guidelines, March 2001. Moreover, as it has not ratified the Hague Regulations, Israel argues that they are not formally applicable to the territories.

<sup>25</sup> A Hebrew acronym for Judea, Samaria and Gaza.



Settlers include all kinds of groups: a farmer in the Jordan Valley, a Russian immigrant who lives in an apartment in Ma'aleh Adumim [a substantial settlement near Jerusalem], a secular person from Ariel [the largest West Bank Jewish settlement, with the status of a city], a *haredi* from Betar Illit [an ultra-orthodox dormitory community in the West Bank], a Torah youth from Yitzhar [a small and very radical settlement near Nablus] and some "dati-lite" [moderately religious] from Efrat [a national-religious suburban community near Bethlehem].<sup>26</sup>

The categories outlined in this section are not meant to suggest rigid groupings, but rather a spectrum of outlooks and attitudes that can serve as a general guide to settler reactions to disengagement.

## A. ECONOMIC SETTLERS

Economic settlers moved to the Occupied Territories chiefly to improve their quality of life, lured by economic incentives such as subsidised and more spacious housing and tax discounts. Paradoxically, they are mostly drawn from opposite poles of the religious spectrum, secular on the one hand, and *haredi*, or ultra-orthodox on the other. For the most part, they have chosen to live on the edges of the Green Line, including East Jerusalem, in what have become sprawling commuter suburbs that, according to several prominent Israeli-Palestinian peace plans, would be annexed to Israel in exchange for equivalent land swaps: Ma'aleh Adumim (30,346 settlers), Ariel (17,555), Givat Ze'ev (10,926), Pisgat Ze'ev (37,300) and Gilo (26,567). Numbering roughly 123,000 (of which 73,800 secular and 49,200 *haredi*), economic settlers constitute the majority of the settler population.<sup>27</sup> According to Peace Now, some 40 to 50 per cent of settlers are secular and some 25 per cent ultra-orthodox.<sup>28</sup>

The proximity to the Green Line, the difficulty of distinguishing these blocs from cities and communities

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<sup>26</sup> "The soft voice of dissent", interview with Emily Arusi, *The Jerusalem Post*, 16 May 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Peace Now population statistics, 2000-2004, Tel Aviv, Israel.

<sup>28</sup> Crisis Group interview, Dror Etkes, Director of Peace Now's Settlements Watch program, Tel Aviv, 24 May 2005. Not all secular settlers are moderate nor are all driven exclusively by economic considerations. Arieh Eldad, a member of the Knesset and a secular settler, belongs to the far-right National Union Party, and has described the evacuation as "a crime against humanity", *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 3 March 2005.

within Israel proper, and the sizeable proportion of recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union means that these settlers share an outlook quite different from the militancy of counterparts in the heart of the West Bank. Most strikingly:

About 220,000 of those living in the West Bank are not even aware that they are settlers. Many of the Russian immigrants did not even know where they were being taken when they got here. Many economic settlers went to places like Tel Adura for a villa they could never have in Israel.<sup>29</sup>

The ultra-orthodox form the fastest-growing segment of the settler community.<sup>30</sup> Opposed both to secular nationalism and to religious Zionism (in that they are either indifferent or even hostile to the notion of a pre-messianic secular Jewish state), they have settled in large numbers across the Green Line.<sup>31</sup> Betar Illit (33,000), Modi'in Illit (30,000) and Emanuel (3,000) in particular have provided cheap housing as an alternative to the vastly overcrowded ultra-orthodox neighbourhoods of West Jerusalem and Bnei-Brak, near Tel Aviv. Though traditionally the *haredi* are not nationalistic and do not consider that the state enjoys any particular religious significance, the interaction with national-religious settlers has hardened their views.<sup>32</sup>

As a result of residence in so-called consensus settlements -- settlements most Israelis insist should be annexed in the context of any peace agreement<sup>33</sup> -- economic settlers have felt only moderate empathy with their Gaza counterparts. Likewise, economic settlers from non-consensus areas that nonetheless fall west of the separation barrier -- and whose fate, therefore, appears, in Israeli eyes, up for grabs -- are typically intent on dissociating themselves from the more radical anti-disengagement campaign. More recently, however, observers have noted more hardline

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<sup>29</sup> Crisis Group interview with Brigadier General (Res.) Dov Tzedaka, former head of Civil Administration for the West Bank, Tel Aviv, 20 February 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Sheleg, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>31</sup> The settlement of Emanuel is an exception to the overall pattern of *haredim* residence in areas abutting the Green Line.

<sup>32</sup> David Landau, *Piety and Power: The World of Jewish Fundamentalism* (New York, 1993), pp. 158-159.

<sup>33</sup> The consensus settlements comprise "blocs" that are all relatively near the 1967 borders; Ma'aleh Adumim (30,346), Modi'in Illit (27,301), Ariel (17,555), Gush Etzion (42,322) and Givat Ze'ev (37,300). They are home to approximately two-thirds of the settlers in the West Bank, excluding Jerusalem.

ideological positions even among some economic settlers.<sup>34</sup>

## B. IDEOLOGICAL SETTLERS

As distinct from those who settled chiefly out of material considerations, the more ideological settlers moved to the territories out of religious and/or political conviction.<sup>35</sup> Often referred to as national-religious settlers -- settlers whose core belief is "the Land of Israel for the People of Israel according to the Torah of Israel"<sup>36</sup> -- they account for approximately 25 to 30 per cent of settlers<sup>37</sup> and have been leaders of the anti-disengagement campaign. Again, there are nuances within this very broad category, reflecting divergent degrees of loyalty to the state and ideological commitment to the notion of Greater Israel. A side-effect of the disengagement plan has been to highlight and exacerbate tensions among so-called ideological settlers, particularly regarding loyalty to the state on the one hand and commitment to a Greater Israel on the other. Although all strongly oppose the disengagement plan, the more moderate intend to resist passively, while others are preparing for or already initiating more activist forms of opposition. The most militant tactics can be expected from the extremists, whose primary attachment is to the notion of a theocratic Jewish state in Greater Israel. Members of the first two categories have been

estimated at 60,000, while the more extreme settlers are said to number roughly 9,000.<sup>38</sup>

### 1. Origins of the national-religious movement

Ideological settlers of a religious bent share roots in the national-religious movement, which has played the most significant and energetic role by far in the settlement effort. This was a historical turnabout of sorts. Modern political Zionism and the effort to establish the state of Israel were led by secular Jews such as Theodore Herzl, and secular ideas clearly predominated from pre-independence days to the 1967 war. That conflict was a turning-point: Israel's lightning-swift victory, its vast territorial expansion and the accessibility of numerous sites of Biblical significance in the newly-conquered West Bank gave a remarkable impetus to religious Zionism and the ideas of one of its earlier theologians (later carried on by his son), Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi in Mandatory Palestine. In contrast to many religious Jews, Kook saw in the emergence of a Jewish state, even a secular one, the "redemptive onset" of Jewish salvation, "God's attempt to enlist humanity and, above all, the Jewish people in His plan".<sup>39</sup> In the aftermath of the war, Kook's son updated and enlarged his father's views, arguing that Israel's triumph was evidence of God's plan to reunify the Biblical Land of Israel. A generation of religious Israelis was motivated to settle in as many areas as possible in the land of *Eretz Yisrael ha-Shlema* (Greater Israel) to hasten redemption.

The Kooks' impact spread far, and both men were elevated to quasi-prophetic status. Paradoxically emulating the early (secular) socialist pioneers, their followers concentrated on creating facts on the ground. "They sought to use the tools and routes of the Zionist left [kibbutzim], including settlements activities and playing a leading role in the defence establishment. They wanted to become the expression of Zionism, one with a moral currency".<sup>40</sup>

While in principle loyal to the state, they often defied its government in establishing unauthorised settlements, confident that -- with the assistance of key state allies, notably within the Defence Ministry and the Jewish Agency -- they would subsequently receive official

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<sup>34</sup> A former head of the Yesha Council, Yisrael Harel, notes that he "spent many long nights" fortifying the spirit of wavering Gush Katif settlers during the first Intifada. In contrast, "during this war they have shown great perseverance, and in resisting the plan and compensation they have inspired us", Crisis Group interview, 29 June 2005.

<sup>35</sup> A small minority of these settlers are of a secular bent, adhering to far-right nationalist views.

<sup>36</sup> "The national-religious settlers take both elements of their hyphenated epithet with the utmost seriousness; living beyond Israel's pre-1967 borders is for them a matter of deep-seated ideological commitment in which the twin elements of Judaism and Zionism are inseparable". Hillel Halkin, "The settlers' crisis, and Israel's", *Commentary*, March 2005, pp. 37-38. That said, ideological settlers also derive unique quality of life benefits from living in the territories: generally having larger families, they are able to buy more spacious houses and live within a homogenous religious community, both of which would be far harder to achieve in Israel proper. Crisis Group interview with Yair Sheleg, Jerusalem, 16 May 2005.

<sup>37</sup> Crisis Group interview with Dror Etkes, Director of Peace Now's Settlements Watch program, Tel Aviv, 24 May 2005.

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<sup>38</sup> Sheleg, *op. cit.*

<sup>39</sup> Halkin, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>40</sup> Crisis Group interview with Col. (res.) Shaul Arieli, former brigade commander in the northern Gaza Strip, IDF head of the interim agreement administration and currently with the Geneva Initiative, Tel Aviv, 22 May 2005.

sanction. A student of Rabbi Kook's son, Rabbi Moshe Levinger, initiated settlement activities in Hebron in 1968, directing the take-over of the Park Hotel, which soon led to the creation of the Kiryat Arba settlement.<sup>41</sup> National-religious settlers made persistent attempts to settle at the Sebastia train station outside Nablus in 1974-1975. They were forced out seven times by the IDF but then-Defence Minister Shimon Peres eventually formulated a compromise under which a small group could "temporarily" remain in an old army camp. This arrangement became Kedumim, the first settlement in the northern West Bank.

In 1974, the national-religious settler movement organised itself more formally as *Gush Emunim*, literally, the "Block of the Faithful". The movement's efforts -- inspired by Kook's son -- were spurred by opposition to Rabin's willingness to withdraw from parts of the Sinai following the 1973 war and focused on expanding settlements in the Palestinian occupied territories. The notion that international efforts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict would result in additional territorial withdrawals was anathema to *Gush Emunim* which, then as now, held that full redemption could take place only once Israel controlled all Biblical land -- in theory including parts of Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq.<sup>42</sup> *Gush Emunim* saw its purpose as revitalising Zionism and, most importantly, preventing the return of the territories conquered in 1967.<sup>43</sup> During the mid-1970s and 1980s, it amassed considerable political strength and established many of the initial settlements in the West Bank and Gaza.

While principally drawn from the young guard of the National Religious Party, *Gush Emunim* cultivated close ties with politicians from all parties. In the late 1970s, its adherents became the leaders of the newly

formed Yesha Council, and it continued over the next two decades to establish new settlements and expand existing ones, often with government support. Like yesterday's kibbutzim, *Gush Emunim* religious Zionists enjoy a societal influence disproportionate to their actual numbers, as evidenced by the prominence of settler youth in elite military units and senior IDF command positions, as well as in key government agencies and parts of the public sector.

## 2. The moderate wing

Most ideological settlers are at the more moderate end of the national-religious spectrum: hostile to disengagement, they are also fearful of overly militant anti-pullout activities and share a loyalty to the state that remains the hallmark of the overwhelming majority of the Yesha Council's leadership. As they see it, and consistent with Rabbi Kook's original teachings, the creation of the Zionist state was a first step in the messianic redemption of the Jewish people; state institutions, and in particular the army, therefore, enjoy hallowed status.<sup>44</sup> The key for them is to distinguish between policies which they reject and the institutions charged with carrying them out, which they respect: "We differentiate between the state and the government. Whereas the government is clearly illegitimate, the former is legitimate. The army and police are being forced to carry out policy".<sup>45</sup>

Ties between these more moderate settlers and the state go beyond political or ideological allegiance. Numerous Yesha leaders are state employees who cannot afford an all-out clash with the central administration:

They live well and do not want to change that. These people prefer to sacrifice a few hundred for the thousands. They will never risk the project, the settlement project in its totality, but they will protest as much as needed to try to prevent the withdrawal without causing animosity among the Israeli public. They will

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<sup>41</sup> Geoffrey Aronson, *Israel, Palestinians and the Intifada: Creating Facts on the West Bank* (London, 1990), pp. 17-18.

<sup>42</sup> David Newman (ed.), *The Impact of Gush Emunim: Politics and Settlement in the West Bank* (London, 1985), pp. 1, 28-30.

<sup>43</sup> Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel's Right* (New York, 1991), pp. 43-51, 63-69, 107-166. Broadly speaking, the moderate-radical spectrum tends to overlap with one's degree of loyalty toward the state on one end and the feeling that territorial control is essential for redemption on the other. "Redemptionists" can harbour moderate beliefs, however. "They can say to themselves that no matter what the politicians decide and do there is a bigger plan -- all this is part of some bigger divine plan". By the same token, some settlers who are loyal to the state may "believe that they can make a difference by their actions. Some are Zionist zealots and therefore will carry the fight further", Crisis Group interview with Yair Sheleg, Jerusalem, 16 May 2005.

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<sup>44</sup> "Dismantling [Israel's] political framework ostensibly in order to preserve Greater Israel is an act of foolishness. Without this basic declaration, we have no moral right to demand that Israel Defence Forces soldiers protect our lives, and we have no moral right to enforce democracy when it supports our viewpoints", Yuval Cherlow, a rabbi and leader of the moderate national-religious camp, *Haaretz*, 9 July 2004.

<sup>45</sup> Crisis Group interview with Adi Mintz, former Yesha Council head, Lod, 26 June 2005.

protest, yell, accuse, but they will not blacken the image of the settlers for Israel.<sup>46</sup>

Other pragmatic reasons lie beneath the moderation of most of the national-religious settlers. As they see it, the real issue is not -- or no longer -- Gaza but rather, the precedent it will set and the prospect of further withdrawals down the line, in the heart of the settlers' enterprise. In their eyes, settlements can roughly be divided into four categories: so-called consensus settlements that even the Left believes should remain part of Israel (the settlement blocs that are included in the Geneva accords,<sup>47</sup> for instance); other settlements that lie between the separation barrier and the Green Line, which they believe Sharon will fight to retain; settlements to the east of the barrier but sufficiently close to it; and, finally, isolated settlements that almost certainly will be turned over to the Palestinians. The government is currently solidifying Israel's presence in the first two key categories through increased construction, tenders for housing units and the construction of bypass roads for settler use only,<sup>48</sup> while taking a more ambiguous stance toward the third. For the Yesha Council, "the real fight is for the communities that belong to category three"<sup>49</sup> and, therefore, resistance to disengagement should be calibrated so as not to alienate the public and jeopardise that goal.

Fear of being associated with extreme opponents of the disengagement plan is palpable among pragmatic elements within the national-religious camp. Maintaining a clear distance between the two, they are convinced, is the best and perhaps only way to "safeguard the future

of settlements elsewhere".<sup>50</sup> In the words of a former head of the Yesha Council:

Many settlers think that if there is a violent clash and bloodshed, it will do tremendous damage to the settlement effort. The cost of a clash can be that we destroy the IDF as a people's army. The IDF cannot be seen as the army of a certain sector -- if it is, it will be unable to defend us and the Blue Line [the 1948 borders], let alone the Green Line. For us there will be no violence. I will lie under a caterpillar or an army truck but not throw sugar in the petrol tank. This is what defines the moderates and separates us from the extremists. I am not sure that we can stop the plan. Once it is started we cannot, but we can slow it down. If there is a rebellion and things spin out of control, then we can cause a rift between the settlers and the rest of the society. We cannot lose that link with the wider public.<sup>51</sup>

Still, Yesha's leaders thus far have refrained from forcefully taking on more radical settlers, fearing they might lose their support and any influence they exercise over them. As an IDF Central Command officer put it, "they fear that they will fail and lose their leadership positions. By this I mean they are scared of calling for moderation and not being listened to".<sup>52</sup>

This has proved controversial, including within Yesha ranks:

They say that when the time comes they will take a stand and lead, that they will then define what is right and wrong. I am not sure that they will do it. During this time they are providing a stage to the extremists, many of whom are real nihilists. There is a leadership void and the extremists are taking advantage of it.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Crisis Group interview with Avrum Burg, former Labour Party Knesset member, 20 March 2005, Tel Aviv.

<sup>47</sup> The unofficial peace agreement texts reached in 2003 by teams of private Israeli and Palestinian negotiators.

<sup>48</sup> According to Peace Now, most construction is taking place in the large settlements of Ma'ale Adumim, Beitar Illit and Modi'in Illit (Kiryat Sefer) located near the Green Line. Dror Etkes, "Construction in the Settlements - April 2005", Peace Now, Israel.

<sup>49</sup> Crisis Group interview with Othniel Schneller, former Yesha Secretary General, Ramat Gan, 13 March 2005. Many settlers fear that all settlements to the east of the barrier over time will become increasingly vulnerable. Crisis Group interview with Shaul Goldstein, Head of the Gush Etzion Regional Council, Tel Aviv, 31 March 2005. The withdrawal from Gaza, which was fenced off in 1994, provides fodder for this view. Crisis Group interview with Uzi Dayan, former Head of the Central Command and National Security Council, Tel Aviv, 25 January 2004. Not surprisingly, many Yesha leaders opposed the construction of the fence in the West Bank.

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<sup>50</sup> Crisis Group interview with Othniel Schneller, op cit.

<sup>51</sup> Crisis Group interview with Adi Mintz, 29 June 2005. In the same spirit, Rabbi Shlomo Aviner stated: "Suddenly, there are among us those whose wisdom has disappeared regarding the Land of Israel. They favour coercion. Suddenly, they forget that clashes work against us and distance the nation from the matter of *Eretz Israel*. Unfortunately, there are quite a few who believe that it is possible to advance such important matters by force, with invective, abuse, pressure, violence, a balance of terror and political machinations", *Haaretz*, 9 July 2004.

<sup>52</sup> Crisis Group interview with an officer in the IDF Central Command, Tel Aviv, 26 May 2005.

<sup>53</sup> Crisis Group interview with Adi Mintz, 29 June 2005.

The pragmatic wing of the national-religious camp also predominates in Gaza, whose longer-time residents, paradoxically, have proved among the most moderate in the face of their impending evacuation. While much has been made of their likely resistance, and while most of them belong to the national-religious camp, they appear in their vast majority (with the exception of Kfar Darom) to oppose active resistance. Determined to eschew violence, they appear to be either resigned to evacuation or to count on divine intervention to prevent it. Such faith is expressed by Rabbi Reuven Netanel of Atzmona, a key figure among Gush Katif rabbis: "We believe that through mere engagement with values and with spirit we can dissolve any force in the world. People are calm...We believe that [the disengagement plan] won't materialise...[we] will continue to display religious and ethical fortitude".<sup>54</sup>

Additional factors account for this apparent moderation. Gaza contains no site of religious significance and thus has not been a magnet for the most extreme forms of religious fervour.<sup>55</sup> Others suggest further reasons, arguing, for example, that Gaza settlers, especially those in the Gush Katif area, owe their pragmatism to their agricultural work.<sup>56</sup> A resident of the Gaza settlement of Ganei Tal who was raised in the West Bank points to the role played by geographic context and location:

I always say that we are the sea and sand people and they are the hill-top people. I lived in the West Bank before I got married and I really think that the view and location make a different person. People in Gush Katif are calmer people and they are more inclined to listen. We listen to our Rabbis and follow what they say. In the West Bank, this is not so much the case. We are less religious than they are, yet more spiritual, in some respects. We are less aggressive than they are. I think that the hard-line approach might bring short-term benefits but has less obvious long-term dividends. I

think that we need a more principled campaign.<sup>57</sup>

In response, a hard-line Gush Katif residents laments: "Sharon knows these people and that is why he chose to start here".<sup>58</sup>

### 3. The hard-line wing

Far less significant numerically, yet extremely active and vocal, the hard-line wing of the national-religious camp still participates (as a minority) in the Yesha Council, while holding that the sanctity of land trumps obedience to the secular state, which it defines as essentially "relative and conditional".<sup>59</sup> Its members consider the more moderate Yesha leaders as subservient to the state, "state workers representing state interests".<sup>60</sup> Forming the hard right of the religious Zionist camp, they still believe in the state of Israel in its current form - a state with a strong Jewish character legislatively enshrined. Disengagement challenges their belief that the establishment of that state and the 1967 war were signs from God that the long redemption process had begun through the recovery of more of the Land of Israel -- hence the justification for far more active forms of resistance, including large-scale civil disobedience of the type experienced in recent weeks, to try to derail the plan. Whereas moderates seek a "controlled explosion",<sup>61</sup> extremists are prepared to risk having events spin out of control.

### 4. The post-Zionist extremists

At the far-right of the spectrum are the most ideologically and religiously motivated settlers whose passion and zeal have on several occasions resulted in violence. In a way, although sharing historical roots with the national-religious population, they are best described as post-Zionists who use current state institutions to further their goal of a theocratic entity and are not interested in Zionism as a national movement aspiring to create a secular nation-state. From their perspective, the fight over Gaza goes well beyond a fight for the preservation of maximum territory in the West Bank. One of the more extremist

<sup>54</sup> "Planting to stay: Gaza farmers sow for next year", *Haaretz*, 25 May 2005.

<sup>55</sup> Some Israelis note, however, that Kfar Darom is the supposed spot where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived and that Gaza was an area of intense Jewish religious thought during the Roman era.

<sup>56</sup> Some 340 of the area's 1,100 families earn their keep from agriculture, producing organic vegetables, cherry tomatoes, chives and geraniums for export. Gush Katif produce accounts for some 60 per cent of Israel's chives and geranium exports.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Crisis Group interview with Shlomit Berger, Ganei Tal resident, Ganei Tal, 21 March 2005.

<sup>58</sup> Crisis Group interview with Michael Nitzan, Gadit resident, Gush Katif, 21 February 2005.

<sup>59</sup> Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel's Right* (New York, 1991), pp. 118 - 121.

<sup>60</sup> Crisis Group interview with Israel Harel, Ofra resident and Yesha Council founder, Jerusalem, 24 February 2005.

<sup>61</sup> Crisis Group interview with Adi Mintz, Lod, 26 June 2005.

leaders of anti-pullout groups explained that he and his colleagues were "focusing on saving Gush Dan [the area of Tel Aviv and its satellite cities], not Gush Katif":

The people of Gush Katif are fighting for their homes. The people in the West Bank and the Yesha crowd are fighting for the West Bank's future. We are fighting a wider war. We are fighting for Gush Dan. We are the ones leading the struggle for a Jewish state. We are the ones who are bringing out the masses. We are preparing for the battle that comes afterwards.<sup>62</sup>

Taking this stance a step further, some settlers have invoked the rabbinic injunction that it is preferable to be killed than to sin as justification for losing one's life for the sake of holding onto the land.<sup>63</sup> Media reports have suggested that some settlers are prepared to commit suicide to thwart the plan.<sup>64</sup> Geographically, a large proportion of them lives in the most isolated settlements, at a distance from the Green Line and in places with particular Biblical significance, often near major Palestinian cities -- or, in the case of Hebron, within the city itself -- and virtually certain to be turned over to Palestinian control (and presumably evacuated) in the context of a peace deal or of another partial withdrawal. Referring to such settlers in Hebron and Bat Ayin, an IDF officer notes:

They are more extreme, and they are also more vulnerable when it comes to the location of their communities and the way that the Israeli public regards them. The leaders of Ma'aleh Adumim and Ariel are less ideological, as are

their communities. They are also more linked to the wider society.<sup>65</sup>

Aspects of this radicalisation can be explained by generational factors. With the occupation in its fourth decade, there are now second and even third-generation settlers who have never lived within the Green Line. Whereas the *Gush Emunim* and Yesha founders generally venerated the state and its institutions -- especially the security forces -- their sons and daughters are "capable of saying to a policeman, 'Arrest me!'. They can stand up to the state and its institutions. They live in the new Israel".<sup>66</sup>

The most extreme elements of the settler community are found in the so-called hilltop youth who have sought to establish unauthorised outposts on hilltops adjacent to existing settlements. A journalist who has followed them explained: "They are anarchists. They are rebelling against authority -- parents, the state. They are New Age rebels".<sup>67</sup> Intensely hostile to all forms of state authority, they are often high school drop-outs who have refused to serve in the IDF. Unstructured and lacking a central leadership, some follow the violent, racist and illegal Kahanist movement. They are said to number roughly 500,<sup>68</sup> although a former police commander in the Occupied Territories notes that their potential influence far exceeds their size.<sup>69</sup> An older Rabbi explains:

My generation is far more linked to the old Israel, the little Israel that existed before 1967. For people like me, who established Ofra [a large West Bank settlement], the continued existence of this community was never taken for granted. We were well aware of the risks involved in the settlement enterprise. We were part of the Israeli melting pot. We grew up with Israel, we served in the army and we were part of that society. The younger generation grew up here and not in Israel. They are not part of that experience and do not feel that very same solidarity with other Israelis. They were raised

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<sup>62</sup> Crisis Group interview with Michael Fuah, Director General of Jewish Leadership grouping in Likud, Mitzpeh Netufah, 26 May 2005. Yuli Edelstein, a Likud member of the Knesset and strong disengagement opponent, said:

We say yes to giving up Gaza and no to surrendering Gilo [a northern suburb of Jerusalem over the Green Line]? There is no real difference between the two. We are in danger of setting in motion a process that sees us retreat right up to Jerusalem. In doing what he has done, Sharon sets the precedent for a retreat to the Green Line in the West Bank. It is like someone who steals a jacket and a pair of pants. His lawyer cannot tell the judge that he will return the pants and keep the jacket. I simply do not buy Sharon's thesis that he can keep the West Bank by letting Gaza go.

Crisis Group interview, Jerusalem, 22 March 2005.

<sup>63</sup> These more radical settlers hold that it was Rabbi Kook's view that one could sacrifice one's life in order to maintain the integrity of the Land.

<sup>64</sup> Yaakov Katz, *The Jerusalem Post*, 3 and 29 March 2005.

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<sup>65</sup> Crisis Group interview with IDF officer serving in Central Command, Netanya, 16 March 2005.

<sup>66</sup> Crisis Group interview with Michael Fuah, op. cit.

<sup>67</sup> Crisis Group interview with Yair Sheleg, Jerusalem, 15 May 2005. The youths' independent thinking extends to matters of religious law, as they often disregard rabbinical teachings. Crisis Group interview with Avrum Burg, 20 March 2005. See also Ina Friedman, "The threat from the hilltops", *Jerusalem Report*, November 2003.

<sup>68</sup> Akiva Eldar, "The fear of civil war", *Haaretz*, 5 January 2004. On the Kahane movement, see below.

<sup>69</sup> Crisis Group interview with Alik Ron, Bnei Brak, 26 May 2005.

in the settlements, in a world that seemed more certain. If there is to be a choice between Torah and the State, the younger generation is more inclined to choose the former. We in the older generation see the importance of both. We all served in the IDF, many of the hilltop youths are drop-outs who did not serve in the IDF or were Yeshiva students [exempted from military service]. They are less connected to the IDF and what it represents.<sup>70</sup>

The relatively familiar dynamic of a younger generation rebelling against its parents is here taking place in a hazardous context. The establishment settler leadership has no control over the hilltop youth, which up to 57 per cent of the settler community deems extremist and dangerous;<sup>71</sup> the West Bank's illegal outposts have become quasi-lawless zones without clear red lines and no obvious way to rein in illegal behaviour. The hilltop youth are responsible for several recent violent confrontations with Palestinians -- mini-riots, harassment and theft of property -- and Israeli soldiers.<sup>72</sup> The young settlers "tend to see things in black and white. We, their parents, are a little more nuanced and have more experience. We feel betrayed by the state, but our children even more so".<sup>73</sup>

Lines between those categorised as national-religious hardliners and post-Zionist extremists at times can be blurred, including concerning possible responses to the disengagement plan. In an implicit division of

labour, some of the more established hardline leaders may well opt for passive resistance -- simply forcing the police to carry them out -- while watching the younger and more passionate settlers resort to violence.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Crisis Group interview with Rabbi Avi Giesser, Rabbi of Ofra, 14 March 2005. The gap between these more extremist young settlers and the Zionist establishment also is illustrated by a recent anti-disengagement plan graffiti campaign, believed to be conducted by hilltop youth, targeting the graves of Zionism's heroes -- Herzl, Ben-Gurion, Rabin, even the Holocaust memorial at Yad VaShem -- with tags comparing them to Nazis.

<sup>71</sup> "Settlers positions towards withdrawal", Peace Now Survey, July 2003.

<sup>72</sup> David Eshel, "Sharon, the settlers and the threat of radical Jewish terrorism in Israel", Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre, 3 July 2004. Since February 2005, youths from the outposts of Ma'on, Havat Ma'on and outposts surrounding Hebron and Kiryat Arba have stepped up attacks on Palestinian children on their way to school as well as Palestinian farmers and international peace activists in the southern West Bank. As of late April, dozens of students had suffered injuries, roughly 24 acres of land had been destroyed or burned and six international activists had been hospitalised in the Hebron region. "Israel/Occupied Territories: Israeli authorities must put an immediate end to settler violence", Amnesty International Press Release, 25 April 2005.

<sup>73</sup> Crisis Group interview with Ayala Azran, Neveh Dekalim resident, 21 March 2005.

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<sup>74</sup> Crisis Group interview with Yesha leader, May 2005.

### III. CAMPAIGNING AGAINST DISENGAGEMENT

In the eyes of most settlers, the die has been cast, and disengagement will take place, the remaining issue being to shape how it occurs so as to determine what comes after. Most settlers also are convinced that, Prime Minister Sharon's protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, further withdrawals are being planned. A journalist who has closely followed opposition to the plan explains, "I think the feeling is that if you can dismantle settlements in Gaza you can do it anywhere".<sup>75</sup> A moderate West Bank settler remarks:

The damage has already been done, even if we thwart Sharon's plan. He has convinced people that we do not belong in those places. Before he has moved anything, he has doomed many settlements by stating that not all settlements will stay. He has reduced the public's motivation to fight for every place.<sup>76</sup>

And, in the words of a rabbi living in the West Bank, "We have reached the end of an era where Jewish sovereignty follows settlements. In this regard we have failed. We were unable to stop it."<sup>77</sup>

The settler movement as a whole has also had to contend with another harsh reality, namely the broad indifference of the Israeli public to their fate. This came as a shock to settlers who had grown accustomed to framing public policy but who, in this instance, have yet to mobilise the segments of society on which they had counted. As they see it, the reward for four years of steadfastness in the face of the Palestinian intifada was a decision to uproot them, quietly endorsed by most Israelis.<sup>78</sup> For them, it is yet another symptom of Israelis' inability to care for one another.<sup>79</sup>

That the plan was authored and virtually single-handedly pushed by Sharon, the settlers' former icon, helps explain its popularity and many settlers' implicit acceptance of its inevitability. Yuli Edelstein, a leading anti-disengagement member of the Knesset, concedes that "the public is not with us. Clearly, it would have been easier to stop this plan if it was led by [former Labour Party leader] Amram Mitzna".<sup>80</sup> Likewise, the location of the settlements has made their evacuation easier to digest. Gaza settlements in particular accentuate the demographic concerns (8,000 settlers living amid more than a million Palestinians) and security issues raised by the settlement enterprise as a whole.

For a young, religious Zionist, political activist, fatalism has infected the settler population, particularly residents of the middle-class "commuter settlements" just over the Green Line:

There is a problem in that there is no full mobilisation against the plan even among settlers. In the cities there is no opposition to the plan. People feel bad -- they feel for the settlers, but they are not out on the streets. The pragmatists -- those people who work in Tel Aviv or live close to but over the Green Line -- will not go to Gush Katif. They have changed and mellowed. They have kids and jobs.<sup>81</sup>

While expressed in the context of the disengagement plan, the sentiment that the settlers have lagged in the public opinion battle goes deeper. A former head of the Yesha Council concludes that the settlers "lost the public a long time ago":

We were mistaken in distinguishing ourselves from the rest of society. Our biggest failure is that we never had a branch of *Hashomer Hatzair* [socialist Zionist youth movement] in Ofra, for example. We did not make enough of an attempt to link ourselves to the nation and today we are paying the price for our separatism.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Crisis Group interview with Nir Hason, *Haaretz* correspondent, Beersheva, 27 March 2005.

<sup>76</sup> Crisis Group interview with Zvi Moses, psychologist and Karnei Shomron resident, Bnei Brak, 20 March 2005.

<sup>77</sup> Crisis Group interview with Rabbi Avi Giesser, Ofra, 14 March 2005.

<sup>78</sup> Crisis Group interviews with Othniel Schneller, former Yesha Council head, Ramat Gan, 13 March 2005, and Shlomit Berger, Ganei Tal, 21 March 2005.

<sup>79</sup> Crisis Group interview with Hagit Yaron, Neveh Dekalim 18 February 2005.

<sup>80</sup> Crisis Group interview with Yuli Edelstein, member of the Knesset, Jerusalem, 22 March 2005.

<sup>81</sup> Crisis Group interview, Ramot neighborhood, Jerusalem, 16 May 2005. Similar concerns were raised by Adi Mintz. Crisis Group interview, 26 June 2005.

<sup>82</sup> Crisis Group interview with Othniel Schneller, resident of Ma'aleh Michmash and former head of Yesha Council, Ramat Gan, 13 March 2005.



Indeed, many of the settlements and especially those in Gaza are geographically, culturally and socially isolated from the rest of Israel; their communities are often "highly selective, and this meant that settlers did not maximise the crossover and interaction with Israeli society".<sup>83</sup>

For these reasons, the settler movement has found it difficult to forge an effective, counter-strategy. Added to this have been the differences in ideological/religious outlook within the national-religious camp that have led to divergent and often conflicting views concerning appropriate anti-disengagement tactics. The principal division is between those who hold that a traumatic withdrawal will immunise the country against any future evacuation and those who fear that aggressive settler behaviour will only further alienate an increasingly hostile public. The result of such unresolved discrepancies has been the absence of a coherent vision within the anti-disengagement camp. A founder of the Yesha Council laments: "Spontaneity and idealism are not going to be enough this time. This might work for an outpost or two -- but this is a different opera."<sup>84</sup>

Perhaps the gravest threat presented by the absence of a strong leadership and coordinated plan is that the tone will be set, by default, by the most extremist opponents, including some who have already or will migrate from the West Bank to Gaza. While their exact number (some estimate there are roughly 500 hard-core extremists)<sup>85</sup> and the ability of the established settler leadership and rabbis to rein them in are unknown, security forces are bracing for various contingencies.

As this briefing was being finalised, settlers and security forces were drawing battle lines, testing tactics and responses. Israel has already witnessed large-scale civil disobedience, including the blocking of traffic; settlers surrounded certain areas in Gaza with barbed wire while stockpiling food. In response, some 2,000 soldiers and border police stormed a hotel in the settlement of Neveh Dekalim, dislodging some 100 militant settlers, and the IDF temporarily sealed off the Gaza Strip, declaring it a military zone.

The choices made by settlers in response to the disengagement plan are described below. Forms of

resistance range from attempts to influence public opinion to the refusal of military orders, civil disobedience, barricading settlement buildings and, most threatening, violence -- against soldiers, politicians or Palestinians.

**Influencing public opinion.** At the core of the moderates' view is a belief that public support is required to withstand pressure for future withdrawals. While this does not exclude active forms of resistance -- indeed, in the eyes of many it invites such action -- Yesha leaders possess "strong political instincts and understand that their anti-peace struggle can only succeed if supported by a large number of ordinary Israelis who live within the Green Line".<sup>86</sup> The battle for hearts and minds began as early as late 2004 with a mass demonstration attended by over 100,000 in Tel Aviv's Rabin Square; since then, there have been dozens of prayer rallies, an ongoing campaign of house visits by settlers to Israelis inside the Green Line to show the human cost of the evacuation; and a second demonstration opposite the Knesset that drew roughly the same number. This campaign targets mainstream Israelis, encouraging them to show solidarity by, for instance, displaying an orange ribbon (the colour chosen by the anti-disengagement campaign, inspired by the Ukrainian revolution) on their cars.

The most moderate settler leaders point to the experience of Sinai and the Yamit evacuation as a reminder that active resistance -- at the time undertaken by the Movement to Halt the Retreat in Sinai<sup>87</sup> -- will not deter future evacuations. In their view, the Sinai opposition campaign was a failure precisely because it did not attract public support.<sup>88</sup> A Gush Katif resident notes, "There is not a single national monument that deals with Yamit and what happened there. We learned nothing from Yamit. I do not think that we can create a trauma here in Gush Katif that will deter people from dismantling

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<sup>83</sup> Crisis Group interview with Yair Sheleg, Jerusalem, 16 May 2005.

<sup>84</sup> Crisis Group interview with Israel Harel, Ofra resident and Yesha Council founder, Jerusalem, 24 February 2005.

<sup>85</sup> Eldar, op. cit.

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<sup>86</sup> Ehud Sprinzak, "The Israeli Right and the Peace Process, 1992-1996", Jerusalem, Davis Occasional Papers, The Leonard Davis Institute, no. 59, July 1998, p. 4.

<sup>87</sup> The Movement was an umbrella structure that brought together opponents of the Camp David plan who sought to thwart the evacuation. Its leaders hoped the pullout would be traumatic enough to deter future withdrawals.

<sup>88</sup> Many Gaza settlers are "serial evacuees", having previously lived in the Sinai and having taken part in the ineffectual opposition of the day.

settlements elsewhere."<sup>89</sup> At most, they assert, a traumatic withdrawal will have a temporary effect.<sup>90</sup>

Such settlers believe the focus should be on a more emotional approach that plays on the tragic human story and appeals to sympathy for the plight of all settlers -- reconnecting Israelis who live within and outside the Green Line to form a united front against not only this but also future withdrawals. According to a Neveh Dekalim resident:

This is a struggle against disengagement [*hitnatkut*]. I did not choose this term, Sharon did. It is a very powerful term. I see the plan as symbolizing a disengagement from the values of Zionism and Judaism, from my grandfather's dreams. We are not fighting for this place. The people of Gush Katif are not fighters. We see engagement [*hitchabrut*] with Israeli society as the right response to disengagement.<sup>91</sup>

A Ganei Tal resident echoes this approach. She portrays her struggle as one over the legitimacy of the "link of *Am Yisrael* [the Jewish people] to *Eretz Yisrael* [the Land of Israel]". The plan is "not a disengagement from Gush Katif alone, it is one from *Eretz Yisrael*, from society and values".<sup>92</sup> Acting on such views, some Gaza settlers (with the support of some moderate settlers in the West Bank) initiated a campaign based on the slogan: "we have love and will win" (inspired from a popular Hebrew song).<sup>93</sup>

Others dismiss the attempt to win over the public with flags, rallies and an appeal to the emotions as hopelessly naive. "They want to get people's love. The problem with this approach is that if you want to scare politicians, you need to be scary; politicians do not count underdogs".<sup>94</sup> A right-wing activist intimate

with Yesha council debates over anti-disengagement strategy notes that the tactic tried at the onset of the campaign -- "handing out cherry tomatoes and parsley" produced in Gush Katif -- was rewarded with scant public interest or support.<sup>95</sup>

**Ensuring a traumatic withdrawal.** A second article of faith -- this one shared by moderate and more hard-line settlers -- is that some level of trauma is required to diminish prospects for a subsequent withdrawal. As stated by a settler leader, "We need a national trauma -- what I call a controlled explosion. Israeli society must understand that it is destroying a way of life, a society".<sup>96</sup> The Yamit precedent -- invoked by the most moderate settlers to oppose active resistance -- is here seen in a different light, as many would argue that prior evacuation encountered in reality only relatively mild resistance. More is required this time to affect Israelis' consciousness profoundly.<sup>97</sup> In the words of a West Bank settler, even if nothing "is going to prevent this tragedy, there have to be mass protests and demonstrations for the historical record. It cannot be a mere cake walk".<sup>98</sup> A Gaza settler agrees:

We want to stop what comes afterwards. The least we can do is make it as ugly as possible. Ariel Sharon is the only one who can dismantle settlements. If it ends here, there is no one else who can take it further. This could all stop with the first withdrawal.<sup>99</sup>

Hence the need to maximise the pain and difficulties in this first withdrawal, not so much in order to thwart it (though some may still cling to that hope) as to tarnish it and ensure it remains a bitter and painful memory in the minds of most Israelis without at the

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<sup>89</sup> Crisis Group interview with Hagit Yaron, Neveh Dekalim resident, Neveh Dekalim, 18 February 2005.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. Crisis Group interview with Zvi Moses, psychologist and Karnei Shomron resident, Bnei Brak, 20 March 2005. The former commander of the Israeli police in the Occupied Territories, Alik Ron, agrees: should the evacuation be traumatic, "just as the thousands of media crews will move on to the next story, so will Israeli society. In time, no one will care". Crisis Group interview, Bnei Brak, 26 May 2005.

<sup>91</sup> Crisis Group interview with Ayala Azran, Neveh Dekalim resident, Neveh Dekalim, 21 March 2005.

<sup>92</sup> Crisis Group interview with Shlomit Berger, Ganei Tal resident, Ganei Tal, 21 March 2005.

<sup>93</sup> Crisis Group interview with Shaul Goldstein, Head of the Gush Etzion Regional Council, Tel Aviv, 31 March 2005.

<sup>94</sup> Crisis Group interview with Yair Sheleg, Jerusalem, 15 May 2005.

<sup>95</sup> Crisis Group interview, Tel Aviv, 23 February 2005.

<sup>96</sup> Crisis Group interview with Adi Mintz, 26 June 2005.

<sup>97</sup> The one incident of dramatic resistance was provided by a contingent of *Gush Emunim* activists who had recently moved to Yamit in hopes of preventing the evacuation. They sought to cordon themselves off in basements and on roofs, some threatening suicide. Through a complicated process of negotiations and the physical removal of settlers with cages and water hoses, the withdrawal was eventually completed with few injuries and no deaths.

<sup>98</sup> Crisis Group interview with Dr. Amiel Unger, Lecturer of Political Science at the College of Judea and Samaria, Tekoa resident, 10 April 2005.

<sup>99</sup> Crisis Group interview with Michael Nitzan, resident of Gadit, Gush Katif, 21 February 2005. On the other hand, several Gush Katif residents interviewed by Crisis Group indicated they resented their West Bank colleagues for treating the fight over the homes merely as a tactical struggle over West Bank settlements.

same time provoking such violence as to permanently alienate them. The efforts to create a national trauma seem to have some momentum: even some Gaza settlers who earlier opposed active resistance appear to be hardening their positions and contemplating heightened activism. For example, rather than sending their children out earlier and simply waiting in their homes to be evacuated, many are now planning to keep their children with them and lock their houses, thereby compelling soldiers to carry out a far more dramatic forced entry.

In the view of some settlers and Israeli observers, Sharon himself is not averse to a traumatic withdrawal to persuade others of the difficulty of the step he has taken and thereby limit pressure, both domestic and American, for further territorial concessions. Yoel Bin-Nun, a prominent rabbi in the West Bank, argues that the Prime Minister "needs national trauma to impress upon the Israeli public and the international community that it is impossible to do this again."<sup>100</sup>

**Massive civil resistance.** On 16 May 2005 and again on 29 June, thousands of Israelis lay down on most major highways, holding hands and halting the flow of traffic for hours, at times also setting car tyres on fire. These were dress rehearsals of sorts, the most comprehensive example to date of such action. While they required only a limited number of activists to pull off, huge numbers of police had to be mobilised to clear the roads. Some disengagement opponents are hoping they can recruit up to 100,000 to walk to the closest major road junction, stop traffic, and strain the capacity of a security force that will need to focus on Gaza. The odds that such action, even if successful, can thwart the evacuation are low. But as a settler put it, "the main battle-front will not be in Gaza -- it will be in the streets of Israel. These guys will make it so painful that no one will think of doing something similar in the West Bank".<sup>101</sup>

More mainstream settler leaders have evinced an ambivalent attitude toward such tactics. On 28 June, the Yesha Council conducted its own "Stop for a moment to re-evaluate" initiative, calling on Israelis to halt their activities, wherever they might be, for

fifteen minutes. At the same time, it has registered opposition to blocking roads; drivers were asked to stop on the hard shoulders of roads and highways during the fifteen-minute period.<sup>102</sup> The Council also is planning a mass march on Gaza and the northern West Bank once the government orders the IDF to close the roads leading to the settlements slated for evacuation.<sup>103</sup> According to some, such forms of mass civil resistance can threaten implementation of the plan: "The real danger is the scenario of 100,000 people reaching the Gaza Strip to foil the plan. They can stop the plan".<sup>104</sup> However, the scenario seems unlikely, and even many settlers admit that such numbers will not materialise, and the infrastructure necessary to feed and maintain them on the ground for a prolonged period is daunting.<sup>105</sup>

There is a flip side, of course, about which some settlers fret. Large-scale traffic blockages might well provoke heightened anger, frustration and antipathy toward the settlement movement. But resistance organisers are unconvinced: "When people are stuck in traffic, they initially are angry, but then they have time to think. You can turn the public's anger against the weaker party. We can channel that anger against the government".<sup>106</sup>

**Conscript refusal to implement IDF evacuation orders.** From the outset, some hard-line settler leaders have placed considerable stock in their plan to encourage mass rejection of disengagement orders by conscript and reservist soldiers. The outcome of the effort remains uncertain. While it appears to enjoy far greater support than similar past efforts by left-wing activists opposed to service in the Occupied Territories, and some believe that as many as 10 to 12 per cent of conscripts and an even higher number of reservists will refuse orders,<sup>107</sup> officials have mostly

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<sup>100</sup> Ari Shavit, "Apocalypse now", *Haaretz*, 28 January 2005. This assessment is corroborated by Amos Harel, a journalist with *Ha'aretz*, who notes that senior IDF officers believe a conflict would nurture an "aversion that would develop to any additional withdrawal in the West Bank", Amos Harel, "The chicken that crossed the road map", *Haaretz*, 15 April 2005.

<sup>101</sup> Crisis Group interview with Michael Nitzan, resident of Gadit, Gush Katif, 21 February 2005.

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<sup>102</sup> "Yesha Council plans to bring country to halt for 15 min. on Mon", [www.haaretz.com](http://www.haaretz.com), 26 June 2005.

<sup>103</sup> The action is planned as a siege to prevent the pullout from taking place, while also bringing the struggle to ordinary Israelis by halting normal life. Nadav Shragai, "Road map for a civil revolt", *Haaretz*, 24 June 2005.

<sup>104</sup> Crisis Group interview with Yair Sheleg, Jerusalem, 15 May 2005.

<sup>105</sup> Crisis Group interviews with religious Zionist activist, 16 May 2005, Adi Mintz, 26 June 2005 and Yisrael Harel, 29 June 2005.

<sup>106</sup> Crisis Group interview with Michael Fuah, op. cit.

<sup>107</sup> Crisis Group interview with an officer in the IDF Central Command, Tel Aviv, 26 May 2005. Typically, left-wing refusal movements could count on only 1,000 reserve soldiers and potential conscripts. In February 2005, Noam Livnat, head of the refusal Defensive Shield Movement, asserted he had collected the signatures of 10,000 active IDF

displayed a generally relaxed attitude, banking that in the end soldiers will not gamble with their careers. The more moderate settler leadership, including a majority in the Yesha Council, have come out squarely against this effort, fearing again a major loss of public sympathy. As an alternative, some settlers are hoping that soldiers will become disillusioned after days and weeks of evacuating people from their homes<sup>108</sup>; again, however, the likelihood seems low, and the IDF has been preparing its soldiers mentally.

Significantly, a number of religious soldiers have initiated a counter-refusal movement.<sup>109</sup> As an observer noted, "the settlers are bound to the state, and the military is an integral and respected element of the state. The idea of breaking this fraternal unity is not easily conceivable".<sup>110</sup> Likewise, prominent rabbis who oppose disengagement have rejected the refusal option.<sup>111</sup> One rabbi living in the West Bank told Crisis Group:

I feel a deep sense of responsibility for the public, and I think that mass refusal will affect relations between settlers and society at large. It could also spell disaster for the IDF. So while it might be a just action, it is not a wise action, for national reasons and reasons to do with the standing of settlers in the eyes of the wider society.<sup>112</sup>

Finally, even should the number of soldiers refusing to evacuate be higher than expected, the tactic may prove ineffective as the IDF has learned from experience to cope with such efforts by not calling up potentially recalcitrant soldiers.

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soldiers and reservists on a petition stating that "Jews don't deport Jews". "Reservist officers in the Binyamin region: we won't evacuate, Sharon has lost his legitimacy", *Yediot Ahronoth*, 6 June 2005.

<sup>108</sup> Crisis Group interview with Ayala Azran, Neveh Dekalim, 23 June 2005.

<sup>109</sup> The first religious Jew to serve on the general staff, Yaacov Amidror, and the only three religious major generals of the IDF also have rejected the refusal concept.

<sup>110</sup> Crisis Group interview with Jonathan Spyer, Herzliyah Inter Disciplinary Center, Jerusalem, 9 March 2005.

<sup>111</sup> "Riskin: IDF refusal jeopardizes state", *Haaretz*, 21 October 2004; see also *Haaretz*, 22 March 2005. Former Sephardi Chief Rabbi Mordechai Eliahu, a known disengagement opponent, unequivocally stated that soldiers "must not disobey orders", *The Jerusalem Post*, 10 June 2005. He recommended soldiers "enter the house, like on Tisha B'Av, sit on the ground with the members of the household and cry... Evacuate tearfully", *Haaretz*, 10 June 2005.

<sup>112</sup> Crisis Group interview with Rabbi Avi Giesser, Ofra, 14 March 2005.

**Barricading in settlement buildings.** Among the most troubling contingencies for the IDF is the "Uzi Meshulam scenario", named after an Israeli who, along with his followers, barricaded himself in his home, threw Molotov cocktails and opened fire on the police, in an effort to compel the establishment of a commission of inquiry into allegations that Yemenite children were being kidnapped and given to Ashkenazi families in the 1950s. The fear is of settler families holing themselves up in their homes or, worse, as suggested by some Gush Katif residents, threatening to commit suicide.<sup>113</sup> Even assuming a late surge in voluntary departures, there is little doubt that a significant number of settlers will remain at the time of the evacuation, compelling their physical removal and increasing the risks of desperate stands.<sup>114</sup> Of perhaps even greater concern than current residents, are the hundreds of extremist West Bank settlers and disengagement opponents from Israel proper who have joined or will join Gaza communities and encourage physical resistance to evacuation.

The threat does not appear to be idle talk. During an interview with a Gaza settler, Crisis Group was privy to a lengthy telephone discussion involving efforts to prepare generators and water storage tanks in anticipation of a barricade scenario. From late May to late June 2005, dozens of radicals from the West Bank -- hilltop youth but also entire families -- and from Israel took over the Hof Dekalim hotel in Gush Katif, renaming it "Ma'oz Ha'Yam" (the Sea Stronghold), before being forcibly dislodged by security forces. There are indications that one or two additional buildings in Gush Katif are being taken over by hard-line disengagement opponents affiliated with the Kahane movement.

**The spectre of violence.** The vast majority of settlers agree that violence against soldiers is a red line and ultimately would hurt their cause.<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless, the

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<sup>113</sup> Crisis Group interviews with Ayala Azran, Neveh Dekalim resident, 21 March 2005 and with Shlomit Berger, Ganei Tal resident, 21 March 2005; Yaakov Katz, "Gaza settlers threaten suicide", *The Jerusalem Post*, 3 March 2005. At the time of the Yamit withdrawal, followers of Rabbi Meir Kahane holed themselves up in a bunker and threatened to commit suicide but Kahane ultimately talked them out of it. As some observers have noted, this disengagement is occurring more than a generation later, following progressive radicalisation among extremists.

<sup>114</sup> Crisis Group interview with Shlomit Berger, Ganei Tal resident, 21 March 2005.

<sup>115</sup> Some hard-line settlers, though stating their intention to avoid bloodshed, nevertheless question whether it necessarily would undermine their interests: "We tell our

prospect exists, especially given the passions the evacuation will provoke and the chaos that might accompany it. Arguably most likely is a scenario of violence against Palestinians initiated in the hope that it might trigger a cycle of reprisals that ultimately would jeopardise the withdrawal.<sup>116</sup> This possibility has been rendered more plausible by decades during which Israel's security services "turned a blind eye" toward radical settler activity<sup>117</sup> and by the amorphous nature of radical groups that operate "without a real leadership or structure. We have very little ability to deal with these people in conventional ways".<sup>118</sup> With a similar objective in mind, radical activists could take action against particularly sensitive Palestinian religious sites, such as Jerusalem's *Haram al-Sharif* (Noble Sanctuary).<sup>119</sup>

Yet another nightmare scenario for the security services involves the assassination of the man most directly responsible for the withdrawal, Ariel Sharon, a threat some are taking seriously.<sup>120</sup> While security personnel appear relatively confident in their ability to uncover and derail any plot of this nature, the real

risk comes from an individual -- undetected by them and operating under the radar -- acting on his own.<sup>121</sup>

Speculation regarding these more extreme scenarios elicits anger from anti-disengagement campaigners who are convinced they are being bandied about to discredit them and silence all criticism, "delegitimizing the settlers through exaggeration".<sup>122</sup> Israel Harel, a former Yesha leader, adds this cautionary note:

The frequent alerts, especially by the head of the Shin Bet [GSS], about the danger posed by the Temple Mount encourages the deranged precisely because it is so apocalyptic; it convinces the lunatics that they have it in their capability to start Armageddon. And there is no price, including life itself, that certain crazies are not prepared to pay, to place their stamp on history and to change it.<sup>123</sup>

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people to come unarmed. Bloodshed will clearly be a shocking event. The question is the way the aftershock plays out -- in our favour or against us", Crisis Group interview with Michael Fuah, op. cit.

<sup>116</sup> The IDF is "worried about the possibility that extremists might try to conduct massacres in Palestinian villages in the northern West Bank in a hope that the subsequent turmoil will stop the disengagement", Amos Harel, *Haaretz*, 20 April 2005. There is precedent for such behaviour. The Gush Emunim Underground (sometimes called the Jewish Terror Organization) was formed in 1979 by *Gush Emunim* members opposed to the Sinai withdrawal. Underground members booby-trapped the cars of five leading West Bank Arab mayors, causing serious injuries, killing three Arab students and wounding 33 others in Hebron. The group's eighteen members were arrested after a plot to place bombs on five Arab buses in East Jerusalem in 1984 was foiled by the General Security Service (GSS) (Shin Bet), Israel's domestic security service.

<sup>117</sup> Crisis Group interview with Alik Ron, Bnei Brak, 26 May 2005.

<sup>118</sup> Crisis Group interview with IDF Central Command officer, Tel Aviv, 26 May 2005.

<sup>119</sup> This, too, has historical precedent. In 1980, Rabbi Meir Kahane was arrested after authorities uncovered a plan to fire missiles at the Dome of the Rock, and in 1982 a Jewish underground cell planned to thwart the Yamit evacuation by attacking it. Yuval Diskin, the new head of the GSS, has admitted his concern that extreme right-wing activists may carry out an attack against the *Haram*. *Haaretz*, 18 May 2005.

<sup>120</sup> Crisis Group interview with an officer in the IDF Central Command, Tel Aviv, 26 May 2005.

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<sup>121</sup> Crisis Group interview, Washington DC, June 2005. Former Labour Member of the Knesset Burg describes would-be assassins as those who reject group authority, possibly yeshiva students and graduates who have been trained to be "independent and not subject to or dependent upon higher or exterior religious authorities. These people feel confident determining their own religious laws and morally proper actions", Crisis Group interview, Tel Aviv, 20 March 2005. A similar view was expressed by Zvi Moses, a psychologist and Karnei Shomron resident, Crisis Group interview, Bnei Brak, 20 March 2005. Observers point to Yigal Amir, Rabin's assassin, who came from Israel proper. During his interrogation, he reportedly stated: "A settler wouldn't have dared to kill Rabin. The settlers are concerned about their image. They're timid, terrified people". Michael Karpin and Ina Friedman, *Murder In the Name of God: The Plot to Kill Yitzhak Rabin* (New York, 1998), p. 8.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Emily Arusi, spokesperson of the Yesha Council, *The Jerusalem Post*, 16 May 2005.

<sup>123</sup> Israel Harel, "The dangerous spin-meisters", *Haaretz*, 14 April 2005.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Although it will affect only a small minority of the settler community and cover only a small portion of the occupied territories, the Gaza disengagement will have profound implications for both Israel and Israeli-Palestinian relations. The demands upon the Israeli government are numerous and often contradictory. Should it fail to respond to some of the requirements of the moderate settler leadership, it risks alienating the community as a whole and increasing the likelihood of a traumatic withdrawal. Should it display insufficient forcefulness in responding to actions of the radical extreme, it risks emboldening it, similarly augmenting the chances of violence. And should it focus on domestic requirements to the exclusion of Palestinian requests for a full withdrawal, the disengagement will hamper rather than help the peace process.

Further complicating the equation is the ambivalence of the two political leaderships. For Sharon, a chaotic withdrawal would register as a personal failure but an excessively smooth one would risk amplifying demands for further -- and, to him, more objectionable -- territorial withdrawals. On the Palestinian side, fear that the withdrawal will be less than complete goes hand in hand with concern that a clean Gaza disengagement would place the onus on them to make the most of their opportunity in that small territory while diverting attention from what happens in the West Bank.

This puts the international community in a delicate but critical posture. For now, it should have only one priority: ensuring that the disengagement is complete and is followed by a credible political process leading to far more substantive territorial withdrawals and settlement evacuation, an end to the armed confrontation and the reining in of militant Palestinian groups. For that reason, the Quartet -- the U.S., EU, UN and Russia -- should take the lead with strong statements pressing the Palestinian Authority and Israel to refrain from and curb any attacks accompanying the disengagement and to engage in a genuine political process after it has been conducted.

**Amman/Brussels, 7 July 2005**



## APPENDIX B

### MAP OF WEST BANK

