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# 1. The Pullout

ON A WARM MID-AUGUST NIGHT, an estimated thirty to forty thousand Israeli civilians converged upon the northern Negev desert town of Netivot as a convoy of buses ferried them to what would become the critical front in their battle to halt Israel's military evacuation of the Gaza Strip and the dismemberment of twenty-one settlements located there. Their plan was to mobilize at Netivot, surge on foot to nearby Kfar Maimon serving as a staging area for a rush to a checkpoint called Kissufim, and then on to the largest and most significant settlement bloc in the Gaza Strip, Gush Katif. With tens of thousands of committed foes of withdrawal firmly planted in Gaza, the logic was that neither the police mobilized for the evacuation nor their Israeli Defense Force (IDF) allies would be able to execute their orders. The plan of the traitorous Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, would be thwarted. So confident of success were the demonstration's leaders, they had only chartered the busses for a one-way trip. The return rides, weeks or months into the future, could be organized at a later date.

Many in the anti-evacuation crowd wore orange T-shirts, shorts, trousers, or frocks, borrowing the official color from the local Gush Katif council. Most of those dressed in more traditional colors still wore orange ribbons, wristbands or laces. The majority of riders were residents not of Gaza but of settlements among the approximately 140 located in Judea and Samaria, what most of the world refers to as the West Bank. Nearly all the men and boys

wore skullcaps, with cords of thread (*tsitsis*) hanging below shirt bottoms. These were religious Zionists, followers of Rabbi Avram Yitzhak Kook, chief rabbi during the pre-statehood period, and his son, Rabbi Tsvi Yehudah Cook, who held the same post years after 1948.

To the elder Rabbi Cook goes credit for developing the doctrine of religious Zionism during the 1930s, thereby breaking the near monopoly of the secular Zionists on the sociology of the nascent state. Devout Zionist Jews are vastly different from some of the Hassidic orthodox, the Haredi, who see Israel as a secular fraud, decline to serve in its military, and believe the faithful must spend their time preparing for the Messiah, whose visit will usher in the true state of Israel. The Zionist orthodox, on the other hand, dedicate themselves to working through the state to help bring about conditions conducive to the Messiah's arrival. In Rabbi Avram Yitzhak Kook's words, "The State of Israel is the foundation of God's throne on earth."<sup>1</sup>

If the elder Rabbi Kook helped define *what* Israel is, then Rabbi Tsvi Yehudah Kook tried to define *where* it is. Following the Six Days' War of 1967, when Israel conquered the West Bank, the Sinai, and the Golan Heights, the younger Rabbi Kook pronounced the results symbolic of God's will that the entire biblical Land of Israel remain in Jewish hands. Thus did the concept of Greater Israel take hold and adherents of religious Zionism become the backbone of the West Bank settlers' movement. Their political and self-governing arm, the Yesha Council—Yesha being a Hebrew acronym for Judea, Samaria and Gaza—led the opposition to the Gaza disengagement plan. Notably, the council's most powerful ally at the time was the more extreme Bayit Leumi (National Home) organization, many of whose members favored outright dispossession of resident Palestinians.

1. Rabbi Dov Begon, "Vayishlach: No Longer Jacob," *Arutz Sheva*, December 14, 2005.

The intensity of devout Zionist fervor has been explained by the important role settlement has come to play in overcoming decades-old feelings of inferiority with respect to both secular Israelis and the Hassidim; historically, religious Zionists could not match the nation-building activities of the former or the religious scholarship of the latter. As Professor Avi Ravitsky of the Institute of Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem told the newspaper *Haaretz*, “Clinging to settlement of the land solved both of these problems. We are both *building* the land and are devout. This gave an entire generation its identity, and now they are going to take this identity away from it. It is being told: You are being defeated by history.”<sup>2</sup>

The religious Zionists also serve in the military in numbers disproportionate to their share of the population. By virtue of an agreement with the government, students from their *yeshivot hesder* (religious schools) commit themselves to military service for sixteen months, after which they can return to their schools to complete their studies over a thirty-two-month period while remaining eligible for further service in the event of a reserve call-up.<sup>3</sup> In this, they are part of what Israelis describe as a “religious revolution” within the IDF. The secular collective farming communities—the kibbutzim and moshavim—have long since become too sparse to satisfy the lion’s share of IDF manpower needs. In addition, many of those from secular backgrounds have had difficulty reconciling their moral and political views with service in places like Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon. The religious have filled the void. Mostly they are trained for army tank and infantry service and many were on active duty over the summer of 2005, assigned to the units charged with enforcing the evacuation. Reflecting the events of the pullout from Gaza (to be discussed be-

2. Yair Sheleg, “The Insult of Religious Zionism,” *Haaretz*, July 25, 2005.

3. Amos Harel, “Countdown for D-Day (Reexamining the Hesder Arrangement),” *Haaretz Special Magazine*, August 15, 2005.

low), the IDF let it be known that it was rethinking the role of mixed units versus those reflected by the yeshivot hesder units.

The Yesha Council took account but not full advantage of the changing composition of the IDF and never formulated a coherent political strategy for addressing such soldiers. As a result, rabbis and other leaders were free to follow individual instincts. A handful of the more extreme rabbis urged soldiers to disobey military orders to dislodge settlers. Others simply pleaded with the military to be tolerant of soldiers who felt they could not in conscience execute the order to evacuate the Gaza settlements, forcefully if necessary. Adi Mintz, former Yesha Council CEO and still a reservist, had told his reserve unit to go on without him. Still smarting in his Lod office just days before the first planned evacuation from what he regarded as a betrayal by Sharon, Mintz said he thought there was a chance the army would disintegrate under the burden of its task. "I hope that the commanders of the army will understand people like me who cannot do it, orders like this," he said. "I think that this order is immoral. I think that this is dangerous to the people of Israel. I think that this order is against all the Zionist movement." Yet he added that whatever the outcome in Gaza, the nation had to continue living together as one people, and that meant no violence. "In all our demonstrations we have told our people not to use violence," he added. "It is a very, very important point to us during all our demonstrations. All the people in the Yesha Council think like me. Not all of the people in the settlements, but all of the people in the Council."<sup>4</sup>

It had, in fact, been an act of violence that led to the settlers' first defeat in July with the forced evacuation of the Maoz Yam hotel at Gush Katif. In the early spring, outside settler sympathizers began infiltrating into the hotel, hoping to eventually attract numbers large and aggressive enough to resist evacuation.

4. Adi Mintz, transcript of interview with author, Lod, August 7, 2005.

But a stone-throwing incident in which a Palestinian boy was allegedly lynched by the outsiders led security forces to clear the hotel a month ahead of schedule. The task took about fifteen minutes, a strong indication that evacuating Jewish militants from their fortresses of choice might turn out to be less difficult than imagined.

Stopping the human rush to Gush Katif in July was a combined military and police operation of about twenty thousand, one of the largest of its kind in Israel's history. Security officials were divided as to where to draw the line. Police Lieutenant Commander Nisso Shaham, serving as Police commander of the Negev region, wanted the buses carrying protesters halted on the roads and turned back to their points of origin even before reaching Netivot, an idea endorsed by Police Major General Yohanan Danino. On the other hand, Police Commissioner Moshe Karadi argued that citizens in a free society should be allowed to express their views. He maintained that the Yesha Council should be told that the police could tolerate a rally at Netivot and a procession to Kfar Maimon so long as the demonstrators made no effort to march to Gush Katif in Gaza. That way the rally would create only a minor "breach of order." Moving into Gush Katif would be a flagrant "breach of law."

The debate became academic when Dudi Cohen, director of Police Intelligence and Communications, confirmed that rally organizers had purchased only one-way tickets aboard the 650 buses hauling the demonstrators, conclusive evidence that they intended to remain at Gush Katif for an extended period. The commanders changed their plans abruptly. Now security forces were told to intercept and turn back as many of the buses as they could prevent from reaching Netivot. No one could know with precision the number of settlers who never made it to the tiny desert town but guesses ranged to the tens of thousands. Those who did press on to their destination conducted their rally and

then marched to Kfar Maimon where most encamped for the night, confident that the morrow would find them in Gush Katif as the leading wedge of a campaign of civil disobedience that would defeat the Gaza pullout.<sup>5</sup>

They were mistaken. That night, IDF forces and police under Southern District commander Uri Bar-Lev surrounded the sleeping minions and, at daybreak, prevented them from moving toward the Kissufim checkpoint. They were trapped at Kfar Maimon, described by one *Haaretz* reporter as “an isolated site that is difficult to access and is surrounded by fences.” Infuriated and offended, the demonstrators lashed out verbally at the soldiers, calling them “traitor,” and even “Nazi.”<sup>6</sup> But to no avail. The line of soldiers—often a big circle with hands joined, rotating around the demonstrators—held. As the day became hot, the ranks of settlers began to thin. Permitted to walk through the line of military personnel in groups of twos and threes, many could be seen on cell phones talking to friends and relatives who had stayed behind, trying now to organize transportation back to the West Bank, their one-way buses having long since departed. To all intents and purposes, the battle to save Gush Katif (so it could be destroyed) ended before it began: with protestors turned back, the residents were left with few tools at their disposal, solely able to evoke human sympathy as the victims of a lost cause.

This was evident a few days later when the disengagement foes mobilized in the Negev development town of Sderot, a regional mini-hub and a harder place to isolate, for what could have been a second effort to reach Gaza. Instead, leaders of the Yesha Council met with security forces before the event and agreed to march only to nearby Ofakim, just outside the entrance to Gaza. Rather than firing up the crowd, the speeches at Sderot seemed

5. See Amir Oren, “Democracy in Action,” *Haaretz*, July 22, 2005, for a complete account of the confrontation at Kfar Maimon.

6. *Ibid.*

more like policy statements intended to run long enough to give the many late-arriving buses a chance to disgorge their passengers.

This time, few insults and epithets were hurled at the security forces. Instead, the largely orthodox group—most accompanied by wives and many by infants and toddlers—broke into chants of camaraderie with those keeping them out of Gaza. “*Hayal, shoter, any ohev otcha,*” they chanted. (Soldier, Policeman, I love you.) “*Hayal, shoter, haim ata ochev oti?*” (Soldier, Policeman, do you love me?) Yesha Council leaders raced alongside the marchers urging good behavior. No attempt to get to Gaza, they reminded the marchers. Please keep in mind that our march ends in Ofakim.<sup>7</sup> That would be the last big event in the desert.

The change in tone was not entirely random. High-level backstage talks between police, IDF commanders, and rabbis associated with the settler movement had established mutually respected ground rules for the events. Also, in preparatory evacuation discussions with the settlers and to assist authorities during the desert confrontations, the IDF had dispatched members of its Special Negotiation team. Formed in the early 1970s to deal with hostage taking and other terrorist incidents, the team was now tasked for the first time to handle highly emotional, sometimes hysterical Israelis who had put their lives into the settlements and now felt themselves abandoned. From all reports these IDF teams, advised by psychiatrists accompanying them to the settlements, contributed to the success of the operation. So did a substantial representation of female soldiers from the Special Negotiating unit assigned to deal with women settlers and their children.

The government also showed it could contain the damage from two nightmare incidents, the murders of eight Palestinian

7. Author, as witnessed at Sderot Rally, August 2, 2005.



civilians by fanatical Israeli settlers in two incidents occurring two weeks apart. The first took place in the Druze Galilee town of Shfaram when Eden Natan-Zada, a military deserter, opened fire aboard a bus, killing four non-Jewish Israelis, including two sisters returning from school. The killer was subsequently overpowered by local police, handcuffed, and then beaten to death by the irate crowd while the police scampered to safety. Sharon immediately branded the shooting “a heinous act by a blood-thirsty terrorist” and was clever enough to note that the victims were also “Israeli citizens.”<sup>8</sup> A few days later he was pictured offering condolences to the father of the two murdered girls. An interfaith delegation of Jews, Christians and Muslims called on the aggrieved families to offer condolences. An announced plan to investigate those responsible for Natan-Zada’s death was quietly dropped.

Two weeks later and just days after the evacuation at Gush Katif had begun, a settler shot and killed four Palestinian workers at the industrial zone in the settlement of Shiloh. The murderer, Asher Weissgan, lived in the settlement of Shvut Rahel, many of whose residents tend to follow the militant leadership of Rabbi Moshe Levinger. Several such followers have allegedly been involved in acts of violence and intimidation of nearby Palestinian villages. Once again Sharon was quick to condemn “this Jewish terror attack, aimed at innocent Palestinians out of a warped belief that this would prevent the disengagement plan.” Sharon’s senior advisor, Dov Weissglas, phoned President Mahmoud Abbas’ top assistant to apologize and Abbas quickly issued a statement urging Palestinians not to retaliate.<sup>9</sup> Like the Shfaram killings, the Shiloh murders quickly disappeared from the front pages

8. Aluf Benn, Eli Ashkenazi, and Jonathan Lis, “Jewish Soldier Kills 4 Israeli Arabs in Shfaram; Angry Mob Beats Him to Death,” *Haaretz*, August 5, 2005.

9. Haaretz Correspondents and Agencies, “Sharon Slams Jewish Terror Attack,” *Haaretz*, August 18, 2005.

with few apparent repercussions. In both cases the families of the dead received compensation from a special government fund reserved for the victims of terrorism.

As the August 15 deadline for the first evacuations approached, the Yesha Council staged massive events at the Wailing Wall and Rabin Square in Tel Aviv, drawing crowds in the hundreds of thousands but, according to the polls, changing few minds. A steady majority of 55–60 percent of Israelis favored the pullout, and while the number of demonstrators was impressive, the rallies at times tended to resemble stops on a bus tour for religious West Bank settlers, many of the same ones appearing at each “performance.”<sup>10</sup> Their speakers continued to passionately condemn the violation of the principle tracing back to pre-statehood days that “Jews don’t expel Jews.” Many continued to believe the withdrawal would never occur. Some were led to that conclusion by their rabbis. Mordecai Eliyahu, for example, chief rabbi of the Sefardi community, contemplated the withdrawal and concluded “it is not going to happen.” Many of his followers echoed those words. Yet their assessments sounded more and more unworldly. Here on earth—or at least that sandy patch of it—the IDF and cooperating law enforcement agencies were in control.

Inside Gaza, perhaps half of the eight thousand Jewish settlers—including nearly all the secular ones—were already gone, having accepted government relocation assistance which was later extended to the recalcitrants as well. Those who remained attracted enormous national and international attention.<sup>11</sup> In just

10. Agence France Presse—English, “Most Israelis Support Gaza Withdrawal: Poll,” *Agence France Presse*, July 18, 2005; UPI Correspondents, “Israelis’ Support for Pullback Increases,” *UPI*, July 1, 2005; and UPI Correspondents, “Smaller Majority Still Favors Pullouts,” *UPI*, June 10, 2005.

11. Greg Myre, Steven Erlanger, and Dina Kraft, “Thousands Hold Out in Gaza Against Evacuation,” *New York Times*, August 15, 2005.

two days, seventeen soldiers per housing unit would make sure the Gush Katif settlers were removed. Homes, rejected by the Palestinians as too small and with too few rooms for their large families, would be demolished by the departing Israelis. The synagogues would be left standing until the Palestinians turned them to rubble. Torah scrolls would be lovingly removed. The remains of the dead would be disinterred for reburial on Jewish soil.

Some reporting missed important nuances of the story. For example, many journalists covering the pullout paid considerable attention to the fate of four thousand greenhouses which had generated about \$120 million a year in flowers and agricultural revenue for the Israelis. At first blush it seemed like a bonanza for the economically pressed Palestinians. A closer look, however, suggested greater complexity. As he assessed Gaza's economic prospects on the balcony of a large hotel overlooking the sea, Salah Abed Shafi, a Palestinian Authority economic planner, said the wealth generated by the Israeli greenhouses would be difficult to transfer.<sup>12</sup> The problem was not how to grow things but how to sell and transport them to market, particularly with travel restrictions and impediments imposed by the Israelis in the name of security. "We have at least twelve thousand greenhouses," Abed Shafi said. "Sixty percent of production cannot be marketed. Now to add another four thousand greenhouses with no guarantee for marketing—it would be a burden."<sup>13</sup> In the end, political negotiations arranged for private donations to compensate the Israelis and let the Palestinians keep the greenhouses on the chance they would be of some utility.

JEWS LIVED IN GAZA in biblical times, but it was modern Israel's first prime minister, David Ben Gurion, who urged the formation

12. Salah Abed Shafi, transcript of interview with author, Gaza, July 30, 2005.

13. Ibid.

of settlements in Gaza; Kfar Darom, in 1946, became the first. Yet this first wave of settlement proved tenuous and a 1948 Egyptian siege forced the abandonment of Kfar Darom and an Israeli withdrawal from the area as a whole until the late 1960s and early 1970s. At that time, Israel was able to use its victory in the Six Days' War of 1967 to renew settlement efforts, resettling Kfar Darom in 1970 and transforming army outposts at Netzarim and Morag into settlements in 1972. A subsequent boost to Israeli settlement in Gaza came as a result of the 1981 peace treaty with Egypt when Egyptian president Anwar Sadat declined to reinherit the territory, which then held some three-quarters of a million Palestinians, a majority of them refugees living in festering camps. He did, however, insist on a complete Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai, including those facilities Israeli settlers had built at Yamit. To make room for the former Yamit residents and others, the Israelis began a new wave of Gaza settlement construction—more than a dozen Gaza settlements were constructed after the Egypt-Israel peace accord. In time, some Israelis would be ejected twice by their government, once from Yamit and again from their “permanent” residences in Gaza.

Over the years, the settlements were deployed with strategic objectives in mind. For example, the Gush Katif bloc of sixteen settlements along the southern Gaza coast could impede access from the large Palestinian cities of Rafah and Khan Yunis either to the Egyptian border or the coast. The other settlement, on the northern end of the Strip, helped extend the Israeli presence from Ashkelon on the southern Israeli coast to the edges of Gaza City. Isolated Kfar Darom is on a north-south axis in the heart of the Gaza Strip and was intended primarily to separate Palestinian population centers while serving as an Israeli transportation corridor. Unlike many of the West Bank settlements, particularly those adjacent to towns and villages populated by Palestinians, the initiative for the Gaza settlements came from the government

with terms more generous than settlers could find elsewhere. They were, in effect, offered a compact for life.

Yet as time would tell, the offer was a ruse. “Every Israeli prime minister since 1967 has wanted to get rid of Gaza,” a senior western diplomat observed. “In any negotiation, from Begin to Barak, it was first item on the table.”<sup>14</sup> Tsipi Livni, the minister of justice who supported Prime Minister Sharon’s decision to evacuate Gaza and later left the Likud with him, offered a similar analysis:

I have some sessions with some of my friends, I don’t like this name, but the Rebels. They say they are totally against this and I say, “But do you not understand that at the end of the day there is the need to do something, to compromise, to give some of the land?” They say, “Yes.” I say, “So now we are talking about tactical issues. It’s not ideology.”<sup>15</sup>

In the first place, the peace treaty with Egypt nullified part of the strategic justification for an Israeli presence in Gaza. Second and vastly more important were the demographics of the territory. Despite nearly forty years of settlement activity only about eight thousand Jews had chosen to reside there, compared to more than 1.3 million Palestinian residents and refugees. Between the settlements, agricultural areas, roads and the Erez industrial zone, Israeli settlers occupied just over 20 percent of the land area. The population density of that area was 123 people per square km. In the Palestinian areas it was 4,362, among the most densely populated patches of land on earth.<sup>16</sup>

14. Interview with senior western diplomat, July 22, 2005. Two senior western diplomats were interviewed during the course of research; both requested anonymity and their names are withheld per mutual agreement.

15. Tsipi Livni, transcript of interview with author, Jerusalem, August 14, 2005. Note that Tsipi Livni was also appointed minister of foreign affairs on January 18, 2006.

16. Peace Now, “Disengagement—Profiling the Settlements,” *Settlements in Focus: Vol. 1, Issue 5*, July 8, 2005 at [www.peacenow.org/briefs](http://www.peacenow.org/briefs); The World Bank,

The numbers understated the physical differences between the two populations. The settlements were prim, spacious, pleasant communities where, according to one sensitive observer, residents worried about Palestinian rocket attacks but left their keys in the ignitions of cars parked casually on the streets. The homes ranged up to six bedrooms. Swimming pools were community fixtures. In the Gush Katif bloc, teenagers would scramble over dunes to surf and swim. The sea was a common heritage. Nearly all the fresh water in Gaza was under Israel's control. But because of the declining aquifer, water for Gaza must daily be piped in from Israel.

Israeli agriculture and industry provided work for about ten thousand Gaza residents. Before the outbreak of violence in 2000, tens of thousands of Gazans found work in Israel each day. With employment in Israel restricted after the eruption of the Second Intifada, local Palestinian unemployment easily exceeded 50 percent. A majority of the population, moreover, were refugees and the descendents of refugees from pre-1948 Palestine, caught in a vice of Israeli settlement activity and a cynical Arab policy of preserving the Palestinian "right of return" to Israel by preventing their resettlement anywhere else. The refugee camps were squalid, overpacked affairs where radical politics flourished, providing a rich popular base for terrorist recruitment. The bigger cities—Gaza, Khan Younis, Rafah—were dusty and pulsing, dangerous places where members of armed gangs and clans could be seen along streets while vendors hawked their goods and wildly careening taxis narrowly missed teenagers scurrying to and from market in carts drawn by horses or donkeys.

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*Stagnation or Revival? Israeli Disengagement and Palestinian Economic Prospects*, December 2004 and "Annex: Disengagement, the Palestinian Economy, and Settlements," June 2, 2004; and United States Central Intelligence Agency, "The Gaza Strip," *C.I.A. World Factbook*, November 1, 2005. Data on the population of the Gaza Strip is available from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics at [www.cbs.gov.il/mifkad/e-mifk.htm](http://www.cbs.gov.il/mifkad/e-mifk.htm).

To many Israelis, Gaza was dysfunctional. It had been fenced off from the rest of the country for a decade. Meanwhile, Hamas and other terrorist groups provided a threat almost exclusively to the Jews who lived there and the soldiers needed to protect them. According to IDF figures cited by the *Jerusalem Post*, in the settlement of Neve Dekalin, one out of five homes had taken a direct hit from missiles, mortars, or gunfire since the Second Intifada began in October of 2000. During the same period, Gaza's Jewish communities had suffered more than 14,790 attacks by automatic weapons, mortars, Qassam missiles, infiltrations, anti-tank rockets, and car bombs. The attacks killed 149 soldiers and civilians.<sup>17</sup>

More than half the Gaza settlers and nearly all of those from four small West Bank settlements also slated for evacuation had moved out by August 17, the day involuntary withdrawal began. Still, many religious Jews of Gaza, encouraged by their rabbis, expected deliverance. God would not countenance Jews removing Jews from the Land of Israel. In the end, the *hesder* soldiers would not enforce the decree. Those who settled His land could show their faith by continuing to live normally, going about their business as though all would be well. Many did, planting flowers and sewing agricultural seeds that would not bloom for months, continuing with lesson plans at *yeshivot*, changing light bulbs, painting rooms, making small repairs associated with continuity. Still there were reports of last-minute resistance. Despite the security, one official estimate proclaimed that as many as five to six thousand protesters had infiltrated the settlements to put up a last ditch battle with the evacuation forces.<sup>18</sup> Some of the newcomers hastily put together wooden shacks, a symbolic gesture of solidarity with the settlers but one that proved little more than nui-

17. C. Robert Zelnick, "The Gaza Pullout," *Boston Phoenix*, September 9, 2005.

18. Guy Raz, "Israelis Begin to Leave Gaza Settlements," CNN Live Sunday, CNN Transcripts, August 14, 2004, 17:00 ET at [cnn.com](http://cnn.com).

sance value to the soldiers. Another report had hundreds of teenage protesters preparing an act of mass suicide, paddling their surf boards out to sea until wave and exhaustion carried them to their doom.<sup>19</sup> The plan evaporated like drizzle in the desert.

In the end there were tears and embraces, but only one incident involving serious violence. At the religious settlement of Kfar Darom, an acid-like substance, along with paint and eggs, was thrown at advancing IDF troops. There were forty-four injuries, none critical.<sup>20</sup> The soldiers, some with skullcaps instead of helmets and some with both, obeyed their orders. So did most settlers, with many turning their homes into rubble at the last minute lest the dwellings fall into non-Jewish hands. Television crews captured it all. Print journalists found families who had lost loved ones to terrorist attacks “defending” their homes against the IDF, children who watched Ima and Abba shed tears of grief and resignation. In barely a week the twenty-one Gaza settlements and four on the West Bank were gone. Gaza, geographically identical to its pre-1967 contours, was returned to the Palestinians. By contrast, few settlements were abandoned in Samaria and the IDF remained in control on the ground.

Gush Etzion is a settlement bloc of thirty thousand in the mountains north of Jerusalem. One day in August 2005, Shaul Goldstein rose from his chair in the business office at Gush Etzion, moved to a large window, and pointed to what appeared to be a filmy white line painted across the bottom of a very distant horizon. “You see the horizon there—that white line on the horizon is Tel Aviv,” he said. “From the white line to this quarry here—this is Israel.” His voice rose with emotion: “And they want us to give away from this quarry to the Jordan River, and this is very,

19. Nadav Shragai, “Gush Katif Surfer Teens Threaten Group Suicide on the Waves,” *Haaretz*, August 8, 2005.

20. Yuval Azoulay, “44 Hurt, 150 Held in Kfar Darom Synagogue Clashes,” *Haaretz*, August 19, 2005.



very dangerous. The purpose is to weaken Israel. And after they have weakened Israel, they will start another war with another excuse, the right of return.”<sup>21</sup>

Goldstein, whose father fought unsuccessfully to capture Latrun from Jordanian forces during Israel's War of Independence, was speaking a week before the Gaza pullout. He thought the political trend was favorable, shrinking support for unilateral disengagement among Israel's Jews. He said political mistakes had been made by the religious leadership in failing to unite politically with secular forces who opposed the pullout on security grounds. But they had learned from their mistakes. Bigger battles lay ahead.

Judea and Samaria would be different, he vowed. Very different.

21. Shaul Goldstein, transcript of interview with author, Gush Etzion, August 7, 2005.