

8. Unilateralism's Future

ARIEL SHARON WAS no happy warrior when the Gaza withdrawal began on August 15, 2005, telling Israelis, "It's no secret that I, like many others, believed and hoped that we could hold onto Netzarim and Kfar Darom forever. But the changing reality in Israel, the region, and the world has forced me to make a reassessment and alter positions."¹ Sharon's reassessment was Israel's. He was the indispensable party to the change, not just because he was the resident prime minister, but because it seemed he would be the toughest to convince and convert.

As noted, he had initially opposed the wall and in 2003 had run against unilateral disengagement. He had been the "Mr. Bulldozer" of Israeli politics in the 1980s, the conqueror and defender of conquest in the 1960s and 1970s, the "retaliator" against Jordanian-backed terrorist incursions in the 1950s while still in his teens. Before being stricken he took his adopted cause out of the Likud Party and was moving "Forward" (Kadima). He had defended it at times with reason, at times with bluster, at times with the suggestion that it would now go into a state of suspended animation or possibly morph into the proposed Road Map talks. The latter talks were proposed with some fanfare in 2003 and were meant to conclude with the formation of a sovereign Palestinian state in 2005. But when the next Road Map session

1. Quoted in Meir Elran, "Domestic Effects of the Disengagement," *Strategic Assessment* 8, no. 3 (November 2005).

is held, it will be the first. And the election of a Hamas-controlled legislature augurs poorly for that.

Sharon and Gaza necessarily—and with some reason—invite comparisons to Nixon and China. The hard-thinking if gravely flawed U.S. president, like Sharon, represented the conservative if not belligerent end of the national security spectrum. He had been a beneficiary of support from the “China Lobby,” which backed the Formosa-exiled Nationalist regime and resisted any suggestion that the United States recognize a government that actually ruled the better part of a billion souls. The lobby trusted Nixon and others like him to maintain the fiction that Formosa was China, just as the Yesha Council trusted Sharon to maintain the fiction that Gaza was Israel regardless of the numbers—eight thousand settlers compared with 1.3 million Palestinians.

But when Nixon did move, the idea was so long overdue that the policymaking elites quickly institutionalized it. Given the Sino-Soviet split, the opportunity for the United States to play détente with one party and normalization with the other was just too good to be cast aside when Nixon himself hit the skids.

Unilateral separation, on the other hand, begins with a disclaimer on both sides of the equation. It is not a very satisfying policy, only, given the current circumstances, better than war, negotiations, or doing nothing. It is rooted in what for many is the painful concession that the dream of Greater Israel is, now and forever, unobtainable however many victories Israel wins both on the battlefield and in the gray world of counterterrorism. And from the peacemaking standpoint, unilateral disengagement is at best less desirable than a negotiated agreement with the other side—if only one could find a representative of the Palestinian people capable of making the deal and then making it stick. Such an agreement would have substantial advantages over the do-it-yourself approach.

The first such advantage is recognition by the international

community and, most likely, active support from parties in the region whose backing could make a profound difference, namely, Egypt, Jordan, and possibly Saudi Arabia. The Gaza pullback produced a harvest of diplomatic rewards. A partial evacuation of West Bank settlements will produce no similar windfall.

Second, a negotiated deal would contain provisions for cooperative enforcement, verification, and dispute resolution. In other words, negotiations could promote regional security and, by virtue of their cooperative nature, deepen ties among former adversaries.

Third, it would address every aspect of the dispute and settle all outstanding issues, with the parties renouncing additional claims. This “end of conflict” scenario could spur a change in the narrative of all sides, perhaps beginning the journey on the long road toward mitigating pervasive historical and cultural animosities.

Fourth, there would be undertakings designed to build and maintain mutual confidence. Such could encompass, for instance, forbidding either party to enter any alliance hostile or threatening to the other while maintaining Palestine as a demilitarized state.

Fifth, there could well be provisions for third-party oversight or peacekeeping. Such a presence is not unheard of in the area, as the Multilateral Force and Observers (MFO) has demonstrated in overseeing the Sinai Accord between Israel and Egypt.

Finally, there would almost certainly be provisions to build upon the already thick network of trade and economic relationships by facilitating travel, reducing checkpoint delays, and encouraging tourism. This would foster peaceful relations among and between the *people* in the region, not merely between the governments.

The only reasonable, indeed the only conceivable justification for rejecting these benefits and opting for unilateral separation is the absence of a negotiating partner. Before the Hamas “tsunami”

of January 2006, PA leaders declared their readiness to negotiate, so ready in fact that they could conflate the three stages of the proposed Road Map into a single grand step. No need to dismantle the apparatus of terrorism— Hamas had chosen to participate in democratic elections for the legislative council. The Fatah-PA vision continued: Hamas would win a substantial but minority bloc of delegates, after which it would ask for representation in the PLO proportionate to its share of the vote. It would receive those seats, but Fatah and its allies would extract a price, namely, the subordination of the organization to majority rule, a renunciation of terrorism, and the disbanding of its militia, perhaps through merger into one armed force representing the PA. Never mind that Abu Mazen had issued the same call—“one authority”—before the Gaza withdrawal began and was summarily dismissed by Hamas and the others. And never mind that in the run-up to election he could not keep hostile militia fire away from his police stations, his election facilities, or even his own house. Soon Hamas would be a part of government and thus have a stake in order and stability.

Or so it was claimed. Both Israelis and senior U.S. officials were skeptical. They argued that Hamas, strong even if in the minority, would most likely try to emulate its Lebanese patron saint, Hezbollah, which has used its militia to secure its place in the political arena and its political connection to insulate its militia from calls to disband. The upshot is a Lebanese faction out of reach of the law, and one which, due to its anti-Israeli zealotry, is capable of sparking a cross-border crisis at any time. Nor are the Israelis very big fans of funneling Islamic militants into the national militia. One senior administration official recalls Sharon's derisive term for the Fatah militias—“Security Terrorists.” His successors are unlikely to view Hamas units with any greater enthusiasm.

The Hamas victory changed the above equation less than one

might have thought. Abu Mazen, appearing more pathetic by the hour, proclaimed himself ready to begin negotiations with Israel. But Israeli prime minister Olmert concluded an emergency cabinet meeting by emphasizing his country's unwillingness to negotiate with any government of which Hamas is a part. The United States emphasized its long-standing position that any party to talks must first recognize Israel, renounce terrorism, and disband its militia. At a White House press conference addressing Hamas' victory, Mr. Bush told reporters, "I don't see how you can be a partner in peace if you advocate destruction of a country as part of your platform. And I know you can't be a partner in peace if . . . your party has got an armed wing." European reaction was similar.

But the pressure to negotiate cannot be escaped indefinitely. When he visited Washington in late May 2006 to receive the administration's blessing for his unilateral withdrawal plan, Prime Minister Olmert encountered resistance to Israel's unilateral drawing of final borders and pressure to begin some sort of peace talks with Abu Mazan. Meanwhile the Fatah leader, searching for a formula that would get Hamas to endorse his commencement of talks with the Israelis, began hinting at a national referendum backing the start of such talks.

It seems highly unlikely the Israelis will be parsing Hamas pronouncements for nuances in style or tone. To them, if there is any lesson to be learned from the Oslo years, it is that ideology counts far more than tactical endorsements of the peace process. Oslo was process oriented. It assumed that bedrock issues would be resolved because they were scheduled to be resolved and because the parties would be meeting to resolve them. But when the "moment of truth" arrived at Camp David and Taba, the Palestinians were not prepared to surrender the right of return and the Israelis were not prepared to resolve the issue by putting Israel out of business as a Jewish state. Had the Palestinians been

taken at their word all along, the talks would not have reached so disastrous an end simply because the parties would have avoided the talks altogether or anticipated the nonresolution and taken steps in advance to cushion the shock, or even to change the subject of negotiation.

Now it is Hamas which must be taken at its word. Its very charter commits the organization to Israel's destruction and the creation of a single Islamic state with nothing but dead Jews commemorating the former State of Israel. It explicitly endorses the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, blames Jews for both world wars, and celebrates the day when, in a final climactic battle, the Muslims will slaughter the Jews. Moreover, the Gaza withdrawal has done little to quench the thirst for Israeli blood. The period since the August withdrawal has been reminiscent in certain respects of the early days of Intifada 2. The Palestinian narrative links the pullback from Gaza to the armed struggle, just as that violent period of late 2000 was inspired by Hezbollah's role in the pullback of Israeli forces from Lebanon.

Once again a suicide bomber murders civilians, five this time, at a mall in Netanya. Weeks later, another bomber at a checkpoint near Tulkarm kills three, including one Israeli officer. Both incidents, a third that injured a score of civilians in Tel Aviv, and a fourth, which killed nine in the same city are attributed to the PIJ. The PA condemns the attacks but moves neither nerve nor muscle against the planners. Instead, after the first incident Israel launches an arrest raid in Nablus, a town that had voted overwhelmingly for Hamas in local elections, killing three terrorists. Now the terrorists strike again, launching one of their periodic missile attacks from their Gaza strip sanctuary toward the southern city of Ashkelon—a bigger if more distant target than the more familiar Negev town of Sderot. Ashkelon is also more inviting to the terrorists because it boasts an important power facility. And now, with northern former settlements, or at least the

rubble from places like Dugit and Nissanit in their hands, the Palestinian reach is longer.

Five Israeli soldiers were lightly wounded in the Ashkelon attack. Israel fired back, killing one Palestinian bystander. Deputy (now Acting) Prime Minister Ehud Olmert warned that, "If the rocket fire on Ashkelon does not stop, there will be a very fierce response, and no option can be ruled out, including a ground option."² Within days Israel declared a strip along northern Gaza as a "no-go zone," trying to push terrorist missile battery operators out of range of Ashkelon. Mahmoud Abbas opposed Israel's move, telling reporters, "Israel has left the Gaza Strip and has no right to come back."³ His top negotiator, Saeb Arakat, complained, "This buffer zone will create more problems than it will solve and renew the cycle of violence."⁴ He acknowledged, however, that PA security forces "haven't done a good job in stopping the firing of these Qassams."⁵ Meanwhile representatives of PIJ, the PFLP, and Fatah's own al-Aksa Brigades pledged to continue the shelling.

The cumulative effects of these and similar incidents make it hard, if not impossible, for the Israelis to address the so-called quality-of-life issues—ease of travel, transport of produce, release of imprisoned Palestinians, employment inside Israel—that would earn the PA some political points with Gaza and West Bank constituencies. James Wolfensohn, the former World Bank president who is the Quartet's emissary to the area, came with plans to create conditions needed to draw billions of dollars of outside

2. Ehud Olmert, "Israel Threatens Harsh Response, Possible Invasion to Stop Rocket Fire from Gaza, 12/23/05," 7 News, Miami/Ft. Lauderdale, Friday, December 30, 2005.

3. Nidal Al-Mughrabi, "Israel Fires to Enforce Gaza Strip 'No-Go' Zone," Reuters, December 28, 2005 21:42:03 GMT (Reuters Foundation).

4. Steven Erlanger, "Killed by Suicide Bomber at Checkpoint in the West Bank," *New York Times*, December 30, 2005.

5. Ibid.

investment to Gaza and the West Bank. Instead he discovered what countless emissaries before him have observed: the unique ability of the Palestinians to bring out the worst in the Israelis, to the ultimate detriment of both.

Sharon at one point threatened to make it difficult for Palestinians to get to the polls on January 25 if Hamas remained on the ballot, a threat he withdrew after Condoleezza Rice protested. By late December, the Israelis were talking about refusing permission for those Palestinians residing in Jerusalem—where Israel claims sovereignty—to vote, a step that could possibly have killed the entire election. After a plea from Abu Mazen they desisted. Balloting scheduled for July 2005 had already been kicked forward to January 2006 in order to give Fatah time to begin wielding the amenities of office to its own electoral benefit. The voting made it clear, however, that without Yasser Arafat—the “Old Man”—at the head of Fatah, Palestinians increasingly viewed the party leadership as old, out of touch, deeply corrupt, and badly in need of the kind of generational overhaul only a period out of office could provide.

The Israeli desire to see the January balloting postponed was not the product of cynicism. As noted by Tsipi Livni, the minister of justice who followed Sharon to Kadima, excluding terrorists from both government and the negotiating table is not anti-democratic, but rather a democratic essential:

When the international community and the United States speak about a two-state solution and about democratization within the Palestinian state, the meaning is that the same rules that even Europe uses when it comes to elections in Europe will be implemented by the Palestinian Authority. And the meaning is that it is forbidden—any political group in Europe cannot be part of an election or cannot participate in an election if it uses or supports terrorist activities or governments. And the same rules will

be implemented here. And Hamas has to choose between being part of the political process or being a terrorist organization.⁶

Ms. Livni—now Olmert's foreign minister—speaks with unusual authority on such matters. She is the daughter of a renowned fighter in Menachem Begin's pre-statehood Irgun militia, a terrorist organization by any honest standard. In June 1948, shortly after Begin had agreed with David Ben Gurion to integrate the Irgun into the regular IDF army, a cargo ship named the *Altalena*, previously purchased by Irgun, left Europe for Tel Aviv. Aboard were an intermingled group of one thousand refugees and Irgun fighters plus rifles, Bren guns, Bazookas, ammunition, and equipment. Begin had agreed to turn some of the cargo over to IDF but wanted to retain enough to outfit some thousand newly integrated Irgun troops in Jerusalem. Ben Gurion ordered the ship diverted to Kfar Vitkin where his commander, Dan Even, gave those aboard ten minutes to agree to turn all weapons over to IDF. After the deadline passed with no response, Even opened fire. The fight was resumed after the ship steamed to a position just off the Tel Aviv beach. Sixteen Irgun fighters and three IDF soldiers were killed. The supremacy of IDF and the other institutions of state had been painfully redeemed. One might describe the lesson as "one authority, one gun, one law."⁷

The incident has assumed epochal dimension over the years. Those who loved Begin and the Irgun recall it as a bloody betrayal of dedicated men. Others, however, see it as an example of the tough steps that sometimes must be taken to tame a recalcitrant faction and subordinate it to government political and military control once the moment has arrived where only one chain of command is acceptable. In this sense, it was a difficult and painful

6. Tsipi Livni, transcript of interview with author, Jerusalem, August 14, 2005.

7. Yehuda Lapidot, "The Altalena Affair," Jewish Virtual Library.

part of the growth of the Israeli state out of competing factions, yet one crucial to the emergence of the state as a coherent political entity.

Boaz Ganor, a keen student of terrorism, thinks an analogous time has arrived for the Palestinians. In talking with him nearly five months before the January election, he urged Abbas to launch a civil war against Hamas and the other terrorist organizations:

We had a civil war before the creation of Israel, the Americans had a civil war, and probably the Palestinians will not have any other way but civil war before they create a state because Hamas and Islamic Jihad would never in my view dismantle themselves voluntarily. And there is no regime that can let Islamic radical opposition have weapons and munitions and terrorist capabilities as much as they want, even if they take part in the political game and have some representatives in the parliament.⁸

Israelis generally have little respect for a political leadership that lacks the courage or the resolve to bring to heel its freelancing terrorist militias. Arafat was no Ben Gurion and Abu Mazen is a pale shadow of Arafat. For different reasons neither has offered the Israelis a true negotiating partner.

Nor does Abu Mazen's weakness end with his inability to bring Hamas and the other militias to heel. Arafat's negotiating shadow is as present as his political shadow. Again Ms. Livni offered valuable insight: "My understanding is that Abu Mazen now, weak as he says he is, and at the beginning of creating something in the Palestinian Authority, cannot sign an agreement that Arafat refused a few years ago. It's too early." Ms. Livni also warned that negotiations that fail may carry a price far more dear than waiting for a more propitious moment to talk, stating, "the Palestinians are not those who say, 'Okay, this is not our expec-

8. Boaz Ganor, transcript of interview with author, Israel, July 26, 2005.

tation, let's do some more talking.' They use terror and Intifada to achieve more political gains. And this is something we cannot afford."⁹

One caveat to the above was offered by Khalil Shikaki at the Brandeis conference insofar as the polling data has changed over time. In Arafat's period with the Intifada, a majority of Palestinians viewed themselves in a life and death struggle with the Israelis. Yet by the fall of 2005, a majority favored compromise built on the foundation of the two-state solution. A skillful Palestinian leader might have figured out a way to chase his followers back to meaningful negotiations. Unfortunately, Abu Mazen lacked the moxie to exploit the opening.

Much of the above would likely have proven academic had the United States, for whatever reason, pressed Israel and the Palestinians into Road Map talks, talks that have appeared as stillborn from the outset. With its great ally demanding negotiations, the terrorism of Hamas and PIJ would have become less the excuse for not talking with the Palestinians, but more the excuse for Israel not talking about anything else. If the apparatus of terrorism is to be dismantled as the Road Map demands in Stage One, then the PA must show that it controls all militias and weapons, that terrorist leaders are tracked, apprehended, and punished, and that attacks against Israel are not tolerated. The PA must account for the training and discipline of its armed security forces, and it must respond to Israeli demands that it work in tandem with Israeli security forces as well as third parties when it comes to intelligence and other counterterrorism operations. Very early on the PA will have to show that the purpose of intelligence is to help authorities to track terrorists rather than to help terrorists track authorities. None of this would have been doable even before the Hamas legislative council victory. An effort to

9. Interview with Tsipi Livni.

initiate such talks with the terrorist group in control of the government would be ludicrous. In this early period of uncertainty, however, one must keep in mind that the Hamas reign could be abbreviated by civil uprising, outside destabilization efforts, or a premature clash with the Israelis.

The Road Map and unilateral disengagement can be sequential rather than mutually exclusive. And the Road Map is not a condition precedent to the next round of unilateral Israeli withdrawals, this time on the West Bank.

Should Israel decide to take the next unilateral disengagement step, it must then choose among a number of possible plans. One of the leading ones, reportedly backed by such past Sharon advisers as Eyal Arad and Eival Giladi, is to stage a large unilateral withdrawal from much of the West Bank. The principal reason for this "Gaza first" rather than "Gaza only" approach is that the Gaza withdrawal only began to address the issues of demography and democracy at the center of the policy debate; separating eight thousand Jews from 1.3 million Palestinians was a good start, but only a start.¹⁰ The West Bank, not counting East Jerusalem and the city's immediate suburbs, still holds 2.5 million Arabs and only two hundred and twenty-five thousand Jews and is potentially ripe for a similar solution to the demographic problem. In his first Herzliya Conference speech as acting prime minister on January 24, 2006, Olmert seemed to suggest that his own West Bank withdrawals would have as their ultimate aim defining the borders of the Jewish state. As he bluntly stated, "Israel will maintain control over the security zones, the Jewish settlement blocs, and those places which have supreme national importance to the Jewish people, first and foremost a united Jerusalem under

10. See Yehuda Ben-Meir, "The Post-Disengagement Anguish," *Strategic Assessment* 8, no. 3 (November 2005). Also, BBC, "Militant 'End West Bank Truce,'" September 29, 2005, BBCNews.com. Available online at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4292448.stm.

Israeli sovereignty. There can be no Jewish state without the capital of Jerusalem at its center.”¹¹

Different advocates of continuing unilateral disengagement by closing West Bank settlements offer different formulas. The safest political step would be to begin with the dismantlement of the illegal outposts demanded by the Road Map and, independently, by the United States. It is a step Israel has clearly been withholding for the moment when either a show of good faith or one of reciprocity is called for. That is and continues to be a mistake. When the government itself not only tolerates but participates in the violation of its own laws, as was documented in the Sason study of illegal outposts, it loses much of the moral standing that is a democracy's ultimate asset.

Once the illegal settlements are gone, the question of “what next” comes to the fore. Some advocates of unilateral separation would take a modest bite out of the settlements in northern Judea before concluding with the closure of every settlement east of the fence line. Others, applying a concept of national security long since overtaken by events, would preserve the row of remote, lightly populated settlements along the Jordan slope and valley.

As no sane prime minister would conceivably take responsibility for dismantling a modern city of twenty thousand, Ariel would remain in Israeli hands—at least until later negotiations with the Palestinians—when it could make a good subject for a land swap with the PA. Efrata, part of the Gush Etzion bloc, would be kept along with all other Jerusalem suburbs. Some would exclude from potential settlement those parts of Jerusalem predominantly populated by Arabs, a move that could be accomplished with a relatively minor adjustment of the fence line while others

11. Ehud Olmert, speech presented at the Sixth Annual Herzliya Conference, January 24, 2006. Text of speech available online at www.israelnewsagency.com/israelolmertherzliyaconferencedisengagement48770124.html.

would save Jerusalem for later bargaining and regard it as a wholly separate issue.

Dan Schueftan, a leading student of disengagement, speaks for a consensus when he says he would disdain a claim of sovereignty over the area retained, anticipating adverse international community reaction.¹² On the other hand, one respected commentator urges an assertion of Israeli sovereignty on the condition (highly unlikely) that the United States would formally join in recognizing this expanded Israel.¹³ The policy of the United States has for so many years been designed to get the parties talking face-to-face about final status that support for the unilateral Gaza withdrawal may come to be regarded as at most the product of special circumstances or, perhaps, an aberration.

Under any reasonable plan, the Palestinians would again inherit Hebron. Kiryat Arba would be shut down. Most of the ultra-orthodox settlements—as opposed to the extreme religious nationalist settlements—would survive as they are located just east of the Green Line, adjacent to pre-1967 Israel. While a majority of settlements (seventy to eighty) would go, the majority of people, as residents of the biggest settlement blocs, would remain. This result was inherent in the proposal Ehud Barak offered at Camp David, implied by the Clinton Parameters, and even included in the Virtual Geneva Accord. It is hard today to imagine any workable scheme producing a different result.

The case for continuing along the path of unilateral separation includes both political and security factors. For one thing, it is supported by a hefty majority of the Israeli public. Sharon suffered only one political setback in his Gaza pullback campaign, a

12. Dan Schueftan, "Unilateral Disengagement," *Israel and the Palestinians* (London: Chatham House, 2005), p. 99. This again demonstrates the tension between the intra-Israeli and Israeli-international community reaction.

13. Hillel Halkin, "Israel after Disengagement," *Commentary* 120, no. 3 (October 2005).

May 2004 rejection of the plan by a sixty to forty vote among registered Likud party members. By shifting his coalition partners he won support by comfortable margins in all subsequent tests, with the exception of one internal political squeaker when Likud considered advancing the primary date. But when the Likud then voted against accepting three new members recommended by Sharon, he decided to end the game once and for all and form his own new party.

Because Israel's "new center" supported unilateral separation, Sharon's new Kadima Party got off to a flying start. Labor found a feisty little battler in Amir Peretz. At first blush he may appear an attractive coalition partner. Upon closer inspection, however, he may well turn out to be the most left-wing candidate on national security issues his party has ever fielded, one whose curiosity about unilateral disengagement will quickly be sated and who is likely instead to press for a negotiated giveaway game, not to mention a host of intellectually bankrupt social programs. Olmert would be well advised to keep his right-of-center coalition options alive lest he find his government perpetually under the threat of dissolution by a Peretz-led Labor partner.

Opponents of a West Bank pullback are not without ammunition of their own, including the spent rounds of rockets fired from the sanctuary of Gaza to Israeli cities in the Negev. To some extent they are already in a position to say, "We told you so." Abu Mazen proved too weak to take political advantage of the opportunity provided by withdrawal. Hamas has captured legislative power while those who launched snipers and suicide bombers against Israel have reaped credit for the withdrawal. They vowed to shower Israel with rockets aimed inside the Green Line and succeeded at least as was necessary to make their political point. National security foes of the Kadima approach suggest that had it not been for the Gaza pullback, IDF troops would have responded to the Gaza rockets with sweeps by ground forces.

Ehud Olmert and other Sharon loyalists say there are no restrictions against such operations should they become necessary. But clearly the pullback has had some unintended consequences. Maintain this policy in Gaza and you have a nuisance, Olmert opponents might argue. Transfer it to the West Bank and you have a disaster.

Again, the argument assumes that the withdrawals are a reward for good Palestinian behavior rather than a way to make bad behavior less threatening while divesting the country of a population it can never absorb and should not try to dominate. The settlements beyond the fence that would be abandoned do not promote Israeli security; they are a drain on it. It is the psychology of withdrawal rather than physical security issues that fuels the secular opposition. This will be particularly true once the fence is completed. Unable to penetrate this security barrier with any frequency, the terrorists will likely concentrate on the more remote, less protected locations. And if the terrorists fail to get the point, if they continue to embrace the idea that each withdrawal is simply an invitation to further armed resistance, there are crash educational courses—recall Operation Defensive Shield—that can be administered effectively. And unlike Gaza, the IDF could and would remain on the ground in much of the evacuated area, at least until the fence is completed in 2006 or 2007 and perhaps until the PA and the new Hamas government sort each other out. No Israeli withdrawal is irrevocable. Not an inch of territory would be abandoned to which the IDF could not return should circumstances warrant. What is irrevocable is retreat from the notion of Greater Israel, ground which should have been vacated long ago.

Before the Gaza withdrawal, many expressed concern about the impact of the operation on the IDF. The concern proved groundless and the IDF came out of the affair with an enhanced reputation. Its motto coined for the operation, “Sensitivity and

Determination,” proved on point. Its Special Negotiation Teams proved no less adept at dealing with traumatized settlers. Casualties were light. Relatively few soldiers, even from the devout *hesder* units—including some whose rabbis urged noncooperation—opted out.

The claim that the West Bank will be more difficult because the affected settlers are more militant is true, but only to a point. What doomed the Gush Katif opposition was not a lack of militancy but a lack of numbers. Eight thousand settlers are roughly 10–15 percent of the number of settlers who would, under any reasonable withdrawal plan, face evacuation from the West Bank. The Gaza number was, of course, augmented by tens of thousands of West Bank settlers, particularly the religious Zionists who led the anti-disengagement movement from the outset and organized through the Yesha Council. Many members of this group, influenced by their rabbis, doubted the disengagement would actually occur or felt that, if it did, it would be so violent and destructive as to make repetition on the West Bank nearly unthinkable. This group—the religious Zionists—is now going through a great period of introspection. Understandably so: in the end, the Gaza withdrawal took all of six days while the pullout from four settlements in northern Samaria was accomplished in a single day.

Yehuda Ben-Meir reported in *Strategic Assessment* that the more senior members of this community are moving toward a consensus judgment that they cannot respond to their loss by disassociating themselves from the remainder of Israeli society. They have effectively lost their veto power over settlement policy both as a short-run step and as the potential end result of negotiations. This consensus is at least partly offset by the conviction of many religious youth, bruised and embittered by their first battle in the arena of national policy, that the cure for failed militancy is militancy of a more pure, focused, perhaps even violent nature. The group now plays derisive word-games with the

name Yesha Council, calling it the Pesha (Crime) Council or even the Yeshu (Jesus) Council because of its alleged propensity for turning the other cheek.¹⁴

But the passion of religious Israeli youth could not this time be translated into sufficient Knesset mandates to halt Kadima's momentum, even though the Olmert slate did less well on March 28 than had been anticipated. When the votes were tabulated, Kadima led the field with twenty-nine mandates. Labor had nineteen, and a spin-off pensioner group picked up another seven. Shas captured twelve. The Likud finished with a miserable dozen seats, only one more than an ad hoc party of Russian émigrés led by a man named Leiberman. Olmert could have gone to the left or right to form his coalition. He went both directions at once. He had ensured that Kadima's triumph would carry with it a mandate to make decisive changes on the West Bank by unveiling, during the campaign, his plan to redraw Israel's permanent borders by 2010 through a series of unilateral acts. Essentially the plan involved keeping Gush Etzion, Ma'aleh Adumiin, and Ariel along with those parts of Jerusalem thickly populated with Jews. The plan would shut down scores of settlements, requiring the relocation of about seventy thousand Israelis residing in West Bank communities. The issue of security was left undefined. If the withdrawals create "permanent" Israeli borders, it is tough to see how the sort of robust military and intelligence operations favored by Avi Dichter—now a prized member of Olmert's cabinet—can continue to operate on Palestinian territory.

The right wing can continue to make trouble for Olmert through demonstrations, civil disobedience, and acts of violence directed against either Israeli security forces or, more likely, Palestinians. Hamas, militant in ideology will likely be constrained by low international regard, bad political relations with Fatah,

14. Ben-Meir, "Post-Disengagement Anguish."

and Israel's chokehold over its economy. Were the Hamas government to fall and a chastened Fatah to recapture political control, Olmert could face both international pressure plus pressure from his left-wing coalition partners to return to a negotiation mode to resolve the final status issues of borders, settlements, refugees, and Jerusalem. That day may be a long way off. Meanwhile, Olmert seems likely to attempt to exploit the irony of having more freedom of action with a radical Islamic group at the helm than would be the case under a more "mature" Fatah regime.

Still, the presence of a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority confronts Olmert with both security and political challenges. Handing substantial parts of the West Bank over to Hamas brings within easy rocket range of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and other large cities representatives of an organization that advertises its endorsement of armed resistance to Israel. To neutralize this threat, Olmert will have to retain a substantial Israeli security presence in the area, even if most of the settlements are closed. This could deprive Israel of much of the international credit its withdrawal would otherwise have generated and trigger domestic disputes as well.

The Hamas face to the PA also exacerbates problems Olmert would certainly have faced anyway owing to the wall-to-wall nature of his coalition, running from Labor on the left to parties representing Russian-born immigrants and religious interests uncommitted to withdrawal on the right. Any move to relinquish the West Bank to Hamas could cause the right-wing side of the coalition to crumble. Olmert could then face the choice of holding new elections or seeking the backing of Arab Knesset factions in order to remain in office, a move that could tear asunder Israeli political society. Strong backing in the polls could save Olmert this choice as it did Sharon; as long as the polls remain in his

favor Olmert will search for ways to play that card again and again.

He is likely to move quickly in an effort to have his borders fixed while the Bush administration remains in office. When determining the nations needed to satisfy their definition of “international recognition,” the Israeli count goes no higher than the number one.