

# GAZA

and Palestinian resistance groups had managed to carry out painful attacks against Israeli forces, increasing the cost of keeping an extensive military presence in the Gaza Strip. Sharon came under further pressure when part of the Israeli Left came up with a new agenda – the Geneva Accord of December 2003 – that promoted the notion that separation from the Palestinians was the only solution to preserve a Jewish and democratic Israeli state. Picking up the “demographic threat” idea, Sharon managed to hijack the Geneva agenda – which was supported by Europe and high-ranking PA personalities – and proposed Israel’s unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, including evacuation of the settlers there, while stressing that Israel would never cede Jerusalem and the West Bank. In April 2004, Sharon gained US President George W. Bush’s support for the plan, on 6 June the Israeli cabinet approved it, and on 25 October it was endorsed by the parliament. However, before reaching that point, it had met with considerable backlash from the Israeli public. Indeed, Sharon had actually run a winning campaign based on a rejection of disengagement and any negotiations with Palestinians. His original proposal for evacuating settlers was struck down in a national referendum, and the final approved plan was a revised version.



PM Sharon sweeping the settlements from “Gaza” to “the (West) Bank” (Ad-Dustur, 27/7/2005)

In contrast, the measure was praised internationally by leaders in Europe, the UN and the US. For their part, Palestinians called for a complete withdrawal from all their occupied territories, not only from Gaza; furthermore, they were convinced that

the plan was first and foremost demographically motivated, with Israel hoping that by ridding itself of responsibility for the 1.5 million Palestinians living in Gaza while continuing to exercise exclusive control over the borders and consolidating and expanding control over the West Bank, it will make up the majority of the population longer than is currently forecasted (i.e., 2020). Israel further hoped to garner international support for expanding settlements in the West Bank in exchange for “dumping” Gaza and to jeopardize the possibility of a viable Palestinian state. What supports this argument is that Sharon could have moved at least a portion of the settlers much earlier, as polls have repeatedly indicated that a significant percentage of the settlers were willing to move if compensated.

“The significance of the disengagement plan is the freezing of the peace process... When you freeze that process, you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state and you prevent a discussion on the refugees, the borders and Jerusalem. Disengagement supplies the amount of formaldehyde that is necessary so there will not be a political process with the Palestinians”  
Dov Weissglas, PM Sharon’s chief of staff, quoted in Ha’aretz, 6 Oct. 2004

## How was the plan implemented?

On 16 Feb. 2005, the Knesset passed the Disengagement Implementation Law paving the way for the pullout. On 15 August 2005, the Gaza Strip was closed off to prepare for the evacuation, which began two days later: Israel then pulled out its troops, removed military apparatuses and a community of Bedouins who were seen as Israeli collaborators and therefore feared for their safety, and evacuated some 8,600 Jewish settlers - less than 0.7% of the total population in Gaza! - from 21 settlements (17 alone in the Katif bloc in southwest Gaza).

## Evacuated 21 Gaza Settlements

Settlement (Year of Establishment)	Population (end of 2004)
Atzmona (1979/82)	646
Bedolah (1986)	217
Dugit (1990)	79
Elei Sinai (1983)	407
Gadid (1982)	351
Gan Or (1983)	351
Ganei Tal (1979)	400
Kfar Darom (1970)	491
Kfar Yam (1983)	10
Katif (1985)	404
Morag (1972)	221
Netzar Hazani (1973)	461
Netzarim (1972)	496
Neve Dekalim (1983)	2,671
Nisanit (1984)	1,064
Pe’at Sade (1989)	104
Rafiah Yam (1984)	143
Kerem Atzmona (2001)*	24
Shirat Hayam 2000*	40
Slav (2001)*	50
Tel Katifa (1992)*	60
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,692</b>

Source: Israeli CBS, quoted by Americans for Peace Now, *Disengagement - Profiling the Settlements* (July 2005); the four settlements marked with a \* are not on the CBS database.

Israel declared a formal end to military rule in the Gaza Strip on 11 September, and the last Israeli soldier had left the Strip by the next day.

Although large areas of Israeli greenhouses were transferred to the Palestinians, the World Bank had already warned as early as June 2004 that the economic benefits of disengagement would be very limited if internal closures are not or only partly eased and the border trade regime is not changed.

In the pullout’s immediate aftermath, Palestinians rejoiced and there was talk of a revitalized economy growing in Gaza. This optimism did not last long, however, as the situation in Gaza has only deteriorated. The Palestinians in Gaza are effectively locked in a prison, and they are worse off by all metrics: physically, emotionally, and economically.

## What is the Legal Status of the Gaza Strip Today?

Israel was hoping to make the world believe that its disengagement from Gaza also implied the end of the occupation and that it was thus no longer bound by the provisions of the Geneva Conventions and Hague Regulations concerning occupied territory in its treatment of Gaza residents. This is not the case, however, and Israel clearly remains an occupying power with all the corresponding legal responsibility attached to it.