

# **“The Decision that Changed History”: Ten Years since the Disengagement from the Gaza Strip**

**Shmuel Even**

August 2015 marks a decade since Israel’s disengagement from the Gaza Strip, heralded by then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as the decision that changed history.<sup>1</sup> The disengagement, which took place during the second intifada, involved a unilateral clearing of the Gaza Strip of an Israeli presence. The move replaced the option of waiting for a renewal of the political negotiations with the PLO and withdrawing from the Gaza Strip under an agreement. The possibility that the entire Gaza Strip would be annexed to Israel in the future was not considered.

Ten years after the disengagement, this article reviews the disengagement plan and assesses its degree of success. The assessment will be presented as follows:

- a. Clarification of the goals and expectations among those who formulated the plan – primarily according to a document on the disengagement approved by the Israeli government in June 2004<sup>2</sup> and statements by Prime Minister Sharon.
- b. Survey of the current situation, a decade later.
- c. Comparison between the expectations and the current situation.
- d. Analysis of the reasons for the difference between the expectations and the current situation.
- e. Lessons for the future about the option of an Israeli unilateral strategy in the West Bank.

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### The Disengagement Plan and the Expectations it Generated

Following the failure of the negotiations with the Palestinians for a permanent settlement and the outbreak of the second intifada (September 2000), Prime Minister Ehud Barak raised the idea of a unilateral separation from the Palestinians in the territories.<sup>3</sup> The logic was that Arafat was not a partner, and would not be one in the future, and Israel therefore had to take the initiative. The risks in this idea, however, were highly visible. For example, Israel would lose the possibility of demilitarizing the territories, and could be attacked with artillery, anti-tank missiles, and so on.<sup>4</sup> Ariel Sharon was elected prime minister in place of Barak, who resigned in February 2001.

In his first term, Sharon rejected the idea of a unilateral withdrawal and even said, "The fate of Netzarim will be the fate of Tel Aviv." Sharon, who was elected to a second term as prime minister in 2003, reversed his position during that year and formulated the disengagement plan.<sup>5</sup> In December 2003, he presented the plan at the Herzliya Conference as follows:

The purpose of the Disengagement Plan is to reduce terror as much as possible, and grant Israeli citizens the maximum level of security. The process of disengagement will lead to an improvement in the quality of life, and will help strengthen the Israeli economy. The Disengagement Plan will include the redeployment of IDF forces 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....At the same time, in the framework of the Disengagement Plan, Israel will strengthen its control over those same areas in the Land of Israel which will constitute an inseparable part of the State of Israel in any future agreement.<sup>6</sup>

In April 2004, Sharon specified those areas: united Jerusalem, Givat Ze'ev, Maale Adumim, Gush Etzion, the Jewish community in Hebron, Kiryat Arba, and Ariel. In exchange for the disengagement, Sharon asked President Bush for United States recognition of the settlement blocs in the West Bank, and a US commitment not to recognize a Palestinian right of return to Israel in a permanent agreement.<sup>7</sup> The letter sent by President Bush supported Sharon's position on the return of Palestinian refugees and acknowledged the reality of the Jewish communities in the West Bank, so that the border in any permanent settlement would not be the 1949 line.<sup>8</sup>

The government approved the disengagement plan in June 2004, toward the end of the Arafat period. The decision said, "The State of Israel has come to the conclusion that there is currently no reliable Palestinian partner with which it can make progress in a two-sided peace process.... The purpose of the plan is to lead to a better security, political, economic and demographic situation," through a unilateral move. "The Gaza Strip shall be demilitarized and shall be devoid of weaponry, the presence of which does not accord with the Israeli-Palestinian agreements," and "the completion of the plan will serve to dispel the claims regarding Israel's responsibility for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip."<sup>9</sup> The Knesset approved the plan in October 2004.

The disengagement began on August 15, 2005, and ended on September 11, 2005. The 21 Jewish communities in the Gaza Strip – Neve Dekalim, Netzer Hazani, Pe'at Sadeh, Katif, Rafiah Yam, Shirat HaYam, Slav, Tel Katifa, Bedolah, Gadid, Gan Or, Ganei Tal, Kfar Yam, Bnei Atzmon, Kerem Atzmona, Morag, Kfar Darom, Netzarim, Elei Sinai, Dugit, and Nisanit – and the four Jewish communities in northern Samaria – Ganim, Kadim, Homesh, and Sa-Nur, were evacuated. Close to nine thousand people were evacuated.

In a speech at the Israel Management Center in September 2005, Sharon listed the achievements and expectations from the disengagement:

The title of your conference is "Decisions Can Change the Course of History." As one who witnessed the decision making during several significant events in our short history, I would like to tell you that it is true... The implementation of the Disengagement Plan, in addition to our determined struggle against terror, yielded fruit in all fields. Israel's international standing improved immensely since the implementation of the plan. We brought about a significant reduction in the level of terror, and increased the personal security of the citizens of Israel. The international markets view the Disengagement Plan as a step which will lead to security and economic stability, which creates movement of capital to the Israeli economy and a sharp increase in foreign investment.<sup>10</sup>

The coordinator of the disengagement in the Prime Minister's Office, Brig. Gen. (res.) Eival Gilady, stated that the disengagement was essential for progress in the political negotiations.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, in view of the high expectations in the world and among certain circles in Israel regarding

further withdrawal in the West Bank, Sharon's office made clear that "the position of the prime minister has been and remains that after the completion of the disengagement, Israel will work towards promoting the political process solely on the basis of the Roadmap. Any additional territorial change will be discussed and decided upon only in the context of negotiations over a permanent settlement."<sup>12</sup>

Sharon's tenure as prime minister was cut short by a stroke. In March 2006, Ehud Olmert, who succeeded him – and who had been a supporter of the disengagement – presented his plan for unilateral "convergence" in the West Bank.<sup>13</sup> The plan was more complex and more risky than its predecessor.<sup>14</sup> During the Second Lebanon War in 2006, Olmert declared that the war would provide momentum for the plan, but later announced its suspension. Olmert returned to negotiations with Abu Mazen, which were unsuccessful. Since then, the unilateral option has been taken off the government's agenda, but it is still a topic in the public debate.

### The Results of the Disengagement

The intifada ebbed in late 2005, due to Israel's defense measures (including Operations Defensive Shield and Determined Path, and construction of the separation fence), and the Palestinians' realization that there was little point in continuing it. The Hamas movement, which opposes Israel's existence, gained increased power during the intifada, and many considered the

disengagement a reward for Hamas and terrorism. Indeed, the disengagement highlighted to the Palestinians that outstanding results, such as removal of Jewish communities (not required under the Oslo agreements) and the absence of demilitarization agreements, could, through a combination of terrorism and patience, be achieved without any quid pro quo from them. In the elections to the Palestinian Authority (PA) parliament in January 2006, Hamas defeated Fatah, in part by exposing the corruption in the PA. Hamas forcibly seized control of the Gaza Strip in June 2007 and has since intensified its power.<sup>15</sup> Note that before the disengagement, outgoing IDF chief of staff Moshe Yaalon issued a warning that Hamas might amass more power following an Israeli withdrawal.<sup>16</sup>

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Over the ten years since the disengagement, the improvised Qassam rocket fire at Israel has been joined by heavy rocket fire, with some rockets manufactured in the Gaza Strip and some smuggled in from Iran; the range of these rockets extends to central Israel.<sup>17</sup> This array also now constitutes a terror artillery arm of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the context of conflicts beginning in the West Bank (e.g., the events preceding Operation Protective Edge). Moreover, Iran has supplied Hamas with additional weaponry (the Kornet anti-tank missile, for example), a widespread underground military infrastructure has been dug in the Gaza Strip, and terrorist squads have gone from the Gaza Strip into Israel (some of them through Sinai).<sup>18</sup> For Israel, the IDF's deterrence and firepower did not end the rocket fire from the Gaza Strip or contain the arms buildup by the terrorist organizations. Land-based maneuvers became necessary a number of times, although their use involved difficult dilemmas and losses, and there have been a series of military conflicts since the disengagement.<sup>19</sup> In the last two years, the efforts by the el-Sisi regime in Egypt to secure the Egyptian border with Gaza constitute a positive turnaround in the efforts to reduce the smuggling of weapons into the Gaza Strip.

The disengagement also had a negative impact on Israel's deterrence in broader circles. Following the disengagement, Hizbollah leader Nasrallah told the Palestinians, "Don't forget that this is only the beginning. I want to remind you that when the Zionist army left Lebanon, it was the first victory in a chain of victories."<sup>20</sup> It appears that a decline in Israel's deterrent capability due to the unilateral withdrawals from Lebanon and the Gaza Strip encouraged Hizbollah to carry out actions against Israel on the northern border, thereby leading to the Second Lebanon War in July 2006. Indeed, after the war, Nasrallah admitted that he had been overconfident.<sup>21</sup> Hamas, however, was not deterred by the blow against Hizbollah and Lebanon in 2006, and continued launching rockets against Israel. Israel thus became embroiled in Operation Cast Lead in December 2008, Operation Pillar of Defense in 2012, and Operation Protective Edge in July 2014. Sixty-seven soldiers and six civilians were killed in Operation Protective Edge (making 2014 the year with the highest

The situation in southern Israel since the disengagement raises doubt about the defense establishment's ability to provide adequate solutions for the defense of day-to-day life in the country following another unilateral withdrawal.

number of casualties in the Gaza Strip of all the years of conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, including before the disengagement<sup>22</sup>).

The recognition that Israel received from the international community for the disengagement faded with the years, and hostile criticism and political activity in the context of the Gaza Strip increased, including the *Mavi Marmara* affair in 2010 and the UN investigative commissions. It appears that the validity of the 2004 letter from President Bush, which was a strategic asset for Israel in the negotiations, has eroded with time and today is highly tenuous. Furthermore, since the disengagement Israel is ostensibly no longer obligated to ensure the welfare of the Gaza population.<sup>23</sup> However, the world continues to regard Israel as responsible for the fate of the population in the Gaza Strip, particularly in view of the economic blockade, Israel's control of the Gazan skies and sea, and the military activity designed for defensive needs.

It is not necessary to carry out a unilateral withdrawal in order to determine permanent borders.

Regarding the Israeli citizens evacuated in the disengagement, a 2010 state investigative commission found, "The State of Israel failed in dealing with those evacuated...Most of the evacuees still live in temporary caravan sites. Construction of most of the permanent housing has not yet begun. The vast majority of the public buildings in the new communities have not yet been built. The unemployment rate among the evacuees is double the rate for the general population.

The economic situation of some evacuees is difficult, and more than a few of them need assistance from the welfare authorities."<sup>24</sup>

### Expectations vs. Reality

A comparison between the Sharon government's expectations from the disengagement and the current situation shows that most of the expectations were not realized, particularly in the security and political spheres (table 1).

The gap between the aspirations and the results is wide. Did the events that followed the disengagement result from the move, or would they have occurred without the withdrawal? The answer is debatable, but it appears that most of the security events in the south over the past decade were the result of the disengagement.

The withdrawal from the Gaza Strip created a new reality that contributed to the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, a steep rise in weapons smuggling, the strengthening of terrorism, and the ensuing cycle of escalation. In

addition, the terrorism in the West Bank (and from there to Israel) can serve as a partial standard for comparison as a region from which no disengagement took place. The West Bank saw a steep drop in the number of terrorist attacks and Israeli casualties, following the security measures taken and the end of the intifada. In other words, in the past decade, only the specific nature of terrorist attacks can be attributed to the disengagement, not the subsequent sharp downturn in terrorism in the south. Instead of daily friction inside the Gaza Strip, the force of terrorism from Gaza and the fighting in the military operations intensified.

Assuming the need to withdraw from the Gaza Strip sooner or later (for at least demographic reasons), it appears that the correct choice for Israel would have been to wait for an agreement before withdrawing. Were it not for the disengagement, Israel could have tried over the past decade to reach an agreement with the PLO (which refused an agreement during the intifada) on control of the Gaza Strip; barring an agreement, that option could still have been available today.

People from the entire political spectrum believe that the disengagement failed, or at least did not succeed.<sup>25</sup> Last year, on the ninth anniversary of the disengagement, Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein said, "Today is my opportunity to ask forgiveness. When the disengagement was underway, some of my friends warned that [the Palestinians] would fire missiles at Tel Aviv. Then, nine years ago, I didn't believe them. I thought they were exaggerating, I also thought their arguments sounded like demagoguery. I was sure that it was an exaggeration, and that it couldn't happen in any situation." Thus, "Behind the disengagement was a conception that failed."<sup>26</sup> MK Nitzan Horowitz (Meretz) said, "The way the disengagement was conducted at the time was a mistake, mainly because it occurred without an agreement."<sup>27</sup> President Shimon Peres, who was one of the supporters of the disengagement, said in October 2008, "Had the disengagement been a success, we would have repeated it in the West Bank."<sup>31</sup> Some believe that there was logic in removing the civilian communities, but that the IDF should have stayed in the area.

There are several reasons for the gap between the expectations of the disengagement and the reality that unfolded.

- a. Israel had unrealistic expectations for a unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip, in the security, political, and economic spheres, without elements in the Gaza Strip agreeing to disengage from Israel.

Table 1. The Disengagement Plan: Expectations vs. Reality

<b>Expectations</b> (according to Cabinet Resolution No. 1996 from 2004)	<b>Actual Results</b>
<b>A. General</b>	
Israel will "disengage" from the Gaza Strip.	There is a recognized and legitimate border between Israel and the Gaza Strip. Israel regards itself as entitled to self-defense from this line. The Gaza Strip, however, has not disengaged from Israel, as is explained below.
<b>B. Security</b>	
Disengagement will lead to a better security situation.	Over the past decade, the Gaza Strip has gone from being a secondary front to the main front. Instead of daily friction within the Gaza Strip, which no longer exists, the force of terrorism against Israel from the Gaza Strip and the fighting in the Gaza Strip have increased. Israel is subject to major rocket fire, and the exposure of the southern communities to terrorism has increased.
"The Gaza Strip shall be demilitarized and shall be devoid of weaponry, the presence of which does not accord with the Israeli-Palestinian agreements." <sup>28</sup>	The Gaza Strip houses much advanced weaponry, as well as the military infrastructure of Hamas and other organizations.
"No foreign security presence may enter the Gaza Strip and/or the West Bank without being coordinated with and approved by the State of Israel."	Hamas rejects Israel's position, and has established a substantial force in territory whose demilitarization Israel regarded as an essential interest. Iran pours arms into the Gaza Strip.
Israel will defend itself. "The State of Israel reserves its fundamental right of self-defense, both preventive and reactive, including where necessary the use of force, in respect of threats emanating from the Gaza Strip."	Israel has difficulty defending itself at the desired level. Its deterrence has failed a number of times; the IDF's firepower and maneuverability have not brought about a halt in the fire or in Hamas' arms buildup. At the same time, the IDF has greater freedom of action to respond with force than in the past.
"The process set forth in the plan is without prejudice to the relevant agreements between the State of Israel and the Palestinians. Relevant arrangements shall continue to apply."	Hamas did not recognize the agreements with the PLO.
The disengagement "should reduce friction with the Palestinian population" (fewer casualties on the Palestinian side).	The fighting methods of the terrorist organizations (hiding among the civilian population) have led Israel into inflicting collateral damage on civilians, thereby evoking extensive international criticism.

**Table 1 (cont'd). The Disengagement Plan: Expectations vs. Reality**

<b>Expectations</b> (according to Cabinet Resolution No. 1996 from 2004)	<b>Actual Results</b>
<b>C. The Political Sphere</b>	
Disengagement will lead to a better political situation.	The political process did not progress. International criticism of Israel's military operations in the Gaza Strip was widespread, even among Israel's friends. The disengagement increased expectations and pressure for a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank.
Progress in the peace process: "The State of Israel supports the efforts of the United States, operating alongside the international community, to promote the reform process, the construction of institutions and the improvement of the economy and welfare of the Palestinian residents, in order that a new Palestinian leadership will emerge and prove itself capable of fulfilling its commitments under the Roadmap."	There has been no progress in the process, despite efforts by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and his offers to Abu Mazen. Moreover, new difficulties have arisen: severing of the territorial unit between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (as per the Oslo agreements), a loss of power by the PLO, and erosion of Israel's bargaining capability. <sup>29</sup>
Strong American support for the Israeli position, according to the Bush letter (appended to the full version of Cabinet Resolution No. 1996).	The validity of the Bush letter is shrouded in fog (Obama has not provided similar commitments).
<b>D. The Economic Sphere</b>	
Disengagement will lead to a better economic situation.	The disengagement did not contribute to a better economic situation. The cost of maintaining a land-based force in the Gaza Strip was replaced by the cost of defense from outside the Gaza Strip, the cost of military campaigns, and losses of GDP.
<b>E. The Demographic Sphere</b>	
Disengagement will lead to a better demographic situation.	Numerically, the Palestinian population under "Israeli rule" has shrunk (which would also be true for the alternative of withdrawal by agreement). The contribution to strengthening Israel's status as a Jewish and democratic country is negligible. <sup>30</sup>
The number of Israelis located in the heart of the Palestinian population will be reduced as much as possible.	While there is no Israeli presence in the Gaza Strip, this phenomenon exists on a large scale in the West Bank.
"The completion of the plan will serve to dispel the claims regarding Israel's responsibility for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip."	The world continues to ascribe responsibility to Israel for the fate of the population in the Gaza Strip, particularly in view of the defensive blockade and military campaigns there.
Those evacuated from the Gaza Strip will be absorbed in Israel.	The state failed in absorbing the evacuees, as found by a state investigative commission in 2010.

- b. Sharon's faulty political assessment: How could Sharon have expected that an Israeli withdrawal on one front only would win prolonged recognition from the international community? Why did Sharon think that progress on the Roadmap, which stalled before the disengagement, would resume afterward? How could he estimate that the disengagement, including the evacuation of settlements in northern Samaria, would strengthen the settlement enterprise in the West Bank? Within the disengagement framework, Sharon's insistence on a return to the exact 1967 border with the Gaza Strip for considerations of legitimacy yielded operational damage (ceding of the Philadelphi route) and political damage in future negotiations, and furnished a precedent for a complete withdrawal to the Green Line. It would have been better for Israel to retain the Jewish communities in the northern Gaza Strip close to the Green Line as a bloc of communities under Israeli control (similar to the settlement blocs in the West Bank, which Israel plans to retain in its territory in any permanent settlement in the framework of an exchange of territories), thereby also supporting the Israeli principle in the negotiations of no return to the 1967 borders.<sup>32</sup>
- c. The absence of a follow up political plan, other than the Roadmap, which had stalled before the disengagement.
- d. An uncalculated risk was taken regarding the capability of the PLO to control the Gaza Strip following the disengagement, given the organization's weakness and Hamas' growing strength. How could the Sharon government expect that the arrangements with the PLO would continue after the withdrawal of the IDF? That the Philadelphi route would not be thoroughly breached for the purposes of weapons smuggling? It appears that there was no thorough staff work by the political echelon with the IDF and the General Security Service about the risks of disengagement, preparation for them, and the response to them. Lt. Gen. (ret.) Moshe Yaalon, IDF chief of staff when the plan was formulated, asserted that those who initiated and led the disengagement under Prime Minister Sharon had no background in strategy, defense, statesmanship, or history. He said they were public relations advisors.<sup>33</sup> The warnings by Yaalon and the General Security Service regarding Gaza went unheeded, and their predictions were realized.<sup>34</sup>
- e. The negative effect of withdrawal under fire in the intifada on Israeli deterrent capability was ignored. There was nothing of substance behind

Israel's declarations that it would respond harshly and immediately against aggression and the development of threats against it.

- f. There was faulty military handling of the strong Hamas infrastructure in the Gaza Strip even before the disengagement, in contrast to IDF measures in the West Bank (such as Operation Defensive Shield in 2002). The infrastructure was the source of terrorist attacks, which contributed to the decision to carry out the disengagement, and a factor in the subsequent overthrow of the Fatah regime in the Gaza Strip.
- g. After the disengagement, there was inadequate handling of the security and political developments that ensued. For example, even when Israel responded to terrorism from the Gaza Strip, the response led to further buildup, and did not prevent the next round.
- h. Faulty planning and management of the rehabilitation of those evacuated.

The results of the disengagement can be attributed to deep root causes, including Israel's extensive settlement policy in the territories – promoted by Sharon since the 1970s – which did not take demographic constraints into account.<sup>35</sup> From the beginning, there was apparently not much logic in establishing isolated communities deep within the Palestinian population, in contrast to the alternative of established communities near the Green Line. Sharon's policy also did not take into account the lesson from the peace agreement with Egypt, namely, to avoid reinforcing communities that were candidates for removal.<sup>36</sup>

### Lessons and Recommendations for Israel

While the Gaza Strip has been prominent as an important theater of conflict over the past decade, the Palestinians are liable to increase their hostile activity in the West Bank, and make it an important conflict arena in order to cause extract political concessions from Israel or an unconditional unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank. This is one of the conclusions they can draw from the disengagement. Additional pressure for withdrawal, even without an agreement, can be expected from parties in the international community.

Lessons from the disengagement regarding unilateral Israeli strategy as a potential option in the West Bank include:

- a. A unilateral measure incurs high costs and risks but few benefits, in comparison with a withdrawal under an agreement that will strengthen the economic,<sup>37</sup> security, and political ties between the parties.

- b. Israel has no practical ability to unilaterally disengage from the territories and the Palestinian population – in the security, political, and economic aspects.
- c. Leaving territories without an agreement is liable to limit the legitimacy of Israeli military intervention, as opposed to intervention in a situation where an agreement has been violated (for example, Operation Defensive Shield in 2002).
- d. Israeli declarations about the use of forceful measures against emerging threats and the use of force from an area that has been evacuated should either be implemented in practice, or not be issued at all.
- e. The situation in southern Israel since the disengagement raises doubt about the defense establishment's ability to provide adequate solutions for the defense of day-to-day life in the country following another unilateral withdrawal, despite the declarations that the IDF is capable of defending the country from any line to which the government decides to withdraw.<sup>38</sup> As of now, the defense establishment has not presented alternatives to the defense provided by the counter-activity and intelligence apparatus supported by IDF forces within the West Bank.
- f. The smooth evacuation of the communities in the Gaza Strip would not necessarily repeat itself in the West Bank, should a similar move be undertaken. It is likely that the force of the opposition and the costs of rehabilitating the West Bank Jewish communities will be far higher than they were in the Gaza Strip (about NIS 11 billion),<sup>39</sup> given the size of the population in the West Bank (outside the settlement blocs), the composition of the population, and other factors.

Against this background, the following recommendations can be formulated regarding potential Israeli measures in the West Bank:

- a. The correct way to achieve a territorial compromise is a stable agreement consistent with Israel's long term goals, with appropriate security arrangements and international recognition. Israel should seek an agreement, while taking steps to improve the situation.
- b. To the extent that Israel is required to determine its future borders (for internal needs and for the sake of an agreement with the US and the international community), it is capable of outlining the map of borders in the West Bank but withdrawing to these lines in the framework of a permanent settlement with the Palestinians, when one is achieved. In other words, it is not necessary to carry out a unilateral withdrawal in order to determine the permanent borders. At the same time, the

- possibility of limited unilateral measures in dire security circumstances<sup>40</sup> outside the line should not be ruled out.
- c. Israel should strive to renew the understandings with the US on the basis of President Bush's 2004 letter, with additional details of the understandings included in it and anchoring them as valid and binding in the long term.
  - d. Insofar as Israel's leadership believes in a two-state solution, it should conduct its settlement policy in the West Bank in a way that allows the future establishment of a Palestinian state.
  - e. Insofar as Israel is required to evacuate settlements, it is better to hand them over as part of the concessions to the Palestinians in an agreement than to destroy them, as was done in the Gaza Strip.
  - f. If the Israeli government nevertheless decides to adopt a unilateral option, it is best that this be done only after creating the conditions for it: achieving international understandings and military capabilities that will ensure security and a clear political future after a withdrawal.
  - g. Israel should take action in any way possible to improve the standard of living of the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and to allow to the greatest possible extent the development of a local government with which agreements and understandings can be reached, in cooperation with the Palestinians (including Hamas), the US, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, and other parties in the international community.
  - h. Israel should maintain its deterrence against Hamas (as a follow-up to Operation Protective Edge), but should not be dragged into attempts at escalation by other parties. It is best to have a connection with the "other side" available, in order to avoid deteriorating into a conflict that neither side wants.

## Conclusion

Following 10 years since the disengagement from the Gaza Strip, it appears that most of the expectations the Israeli had from the measure were not met. The Israeli presence has been eliminated from the Gaza Strip, but the Gaza Strip is still tied to Israel, and constitutes a security, political, economic, and humanitarian burden. The results of disengagement cast doubt on the widely held assumption that the IDF will be able to provide Israel with appropriate defense from a line to which the state decides to withdraw, and increased doubt about whether a similar unilateral measure

in the West Bank would be worthwhile. Dealing with the Gaza Strip remains a difficult and urgent challenge. Israel should take action to improve the situation in the Gaza Strip, while cooperating with the relevant parties.

### Notes

I would like to thank INSS Director Maj. Gen. (ret.) Amos Yadlin for his comments in preparation of this essay. The opinions expressed in this article are mine alone.

- 1 Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Herzliya, September 2005, quoted in Shmuel Even, "Israel's Strategy of Unilateral Withdrawal," *Strategic Assessment* 12, no. 1 (2009): 29-45.
- 2 Prime Minister's Office, Cabinet Decision No. 1996, complete version, "The Revised Disengagement Plan," June 6, 2004, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/mfadocuments/pages/revised%20disengagement%20plan%206-june-2004.aspx>.
- 3 Linoy Bar Geffen, "Barak Explains: Why I Decided to Join the Sharon Government," *Ynet*, February 16, 2001.
- 4 Shaul Kimhi, Shmuel Even, and Jerrod Post, *Yasir Arafat: Psychological Profile and Strategic Analysis*, International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), Herzliya, September 2001, p. 53.
- 5 Ari Shavit, "The Complete Interview with Dov Weisglas," *Walla*, October 8, 2004, <http://news.walla.co.il/item/609133>.
- 6 Address by PM Ariel Sharon at the Fourth Herzliya Conference, December 18, 2003, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2003/Pages/Address%20by%20PM%20Ariel%20Sharon%20at%20the%20Fourth%20Herzliya.aspx>.
- 7 Yoav Yitzhak, "Sharon Declares: The Big Plan: Israel Will Retain Six Settlement Blocs," *News1*, April 13, 2004.
- 8 White House website, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/04/20040414-3.html>.
- 9 See note 2.
- 10 Quoted in Even, "Israel's Strategy of Unilateral Withdrawal."
- 11 Even, "Israel's Strategy of Unilateral Withdrawal."
- 12 Even, "Israel's Strategy of Unilateral Withdrawal."
- 13 "Convergence Plan," Reut Institute website, <http://www.reut-institute.org/he/Publication.aspx?PublicationId=94>.
- 14 See Even, "Israel's Strategy of Unilateral Withdrawal."
- 15 A survey published by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in March 2015 found that 74 percent of the respondents in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip supported the Hamas policy of resistance.
- 16 Yaalon estimated that if Fatah continued with its behavior, Hamas would ultimately gain control of Gaza, and that within two to three years Israel was liable to find itself facing a Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip. See Ari Shavit,

- "Outgoing IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon: A Second Terrorism War Can Be Expected after the Disengagement that Will Include Terrorist Attacks in Central Israel," *The Marker*, June 1, 2005, <http://www.themarker.com/misc/1.295610>.
- 17 "The Threat of Rockets from the Gaza Strip, 2000-2007," Israel Intelligence Heritage and Commemoration Center website, December 14, 2007, <http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/he/article/18536>.
- 18 For example, the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit in 2006. In 2007-8, the only suicide attacks against Israel came from the Gaza Strip (Eilat, Dimona). In 2014, terrorist attacks were attempted through attack tunnels and by a naval commando force.
- 19 "From the Disengagement to Operation Protective Edge: The War in the Gaza Strip, a Special Review," *Minimum Time (Pazam)*, July 10, 2014, <http://www.mako.co.il/pzm-israel-wars/operation-protective-edge/Article-9a4a5e78fb02741006.htm>.
- 20 "Disengagement from Gaza, and a Carnival in Rafiah," *Nana News*, August 15, 2005, <http://news.nana10.co.il/Article/?ArticleID=198875>.
- 21 According to Nasrallah, had he thought that kidnapping the soldiers would cause a war, the attack would not have taken place. See Itamar Inbari and Reuters, "Nasrallah: We Did Not Estimate Israel's Reaction Correctly," *NRG*, August 27, 2006, <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/470/643.html>.
- 22 Gili Cohen, "The Never-Ending Story: From the First Qassam Fired at Sderot to the Present Time," *Haaretz*, July 12, 2014, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/1.2373486>.
- 23 IDF MAG Corps, "What Are Israel's Legal Obligations toward the Gaza Strip and its Inhabitants?" August 12, 2014, <http://www.law.idf.il/342-he/Patzar.aspx>.
- 24 Report of the State Investigative Commission "On the Subject of the Treatment by the Authorized Authorities of the Gush Katif and Northern Samarian Evacuees," p. 97, June 6, 2010.
- 25 See also: Zaki Shalom, "The Disengagement Plan: Vision and Reality," *Strategic Assessment* 13, no. 3 (2010): 85-100; Even, "Israel's Strategy of Unilateral Withdrawal."
- 26 Knesset Announcements, "Knesset Plenum Conducts Special Discussion Marking Nine Years since the Disengagement," Knesset website, June 15, 2014, <http://main.knesset.gov.il/News/PressReleases/pages/press150714-p09.aspx>.
- 27 Knesset Announcements, "Former Deputy General Security Service Head: We Warned the Politicians of the Intelligence Difficulty the Disengagement Would Create," June 15, 2014, <http://main.knesset.gov.il/News/PressReleases/Pages/press150714-lp7.aspx>.
- 28 Cabinet Resolution No. 1996 still included IDF deployment on the border with Egypt (the Philadelphi route). Only during the disengagement was it decided (against the opposition of the General Security Service) to withdraw

- from the area, on the assumption that Egypt and the PA would control the border.
- 29 Israel has fewer assets – less bargaining capability; there have been more Israeli concessions without any quid pro quo, i.e., less Palestinian willingness to compromise.
  - 30 Even before the disengagement, there was no concern in Israel that the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip would be integrated as Israeli citizens and vote for its institutions.
  - 31 Nir Yahav, "Peres Hints: Disengagement Was a Failure," *Walla*, October 28, 2008, <http://news.walla.co.il/item/1367621>.
  - 32 This was the suggestion of senior figures in the Labor Party before the disengagement. See Avi Parhan, "An Expected, Logical Decision," *Ynet*, July 5, 2005, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3108330,00.html>.
  - 33 "Ya'alon: Disengagement Resulted from Sharon's Personal Plight," *Ynet*, July 6, 2007, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3271887,00.html>.
  - 34 See above, notes 16 and 30.
  - 35 "Sharon Now (and Then) – Special Broadcast," *Channel 1*, January 17, 2015.
  - 36 This root cause applies to evacuation in a unilateral move or with an agreement.
  - 37 *The Costs of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, Santa Monica (CA: RAND Coporation, 2015), [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR740.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR740.html).
  - 38 For example, General (res.) Alex Tal, "A Change in Borders Does Not Constitute a Threat," March 2015, Commanders for Israel's Security website, <http://www.cis.org.il/2015/03/724>.
  - 39 Ilan Biton, "The Plan for Disengagement from the Gaza Strip and the Jewish Communities in Northern Samaria – Estimated Cost," Knesset Research and Information Center, January 31, 2010, [www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/pdf/m02539.pdf](http://www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/pdf/m02539.pdf).
  - 40 This question was raised about Netzarim even before the disengagement.