

# Discussing the Eviction Process

by [Michael Herzog \(/experts/michael-herzog\)](/experts/michael-herzog)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Michael Herzog \(/experts/michael-herzog\)](/experts/michael-herzog)

Michael Herzog was appointed Israel's ambassador to the United States in 2021. Previously, he was an international fellow at The Washington Institute.

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The following is a transcript from the PBS program NewsHour.

MARGARET WARNER: For insight into how the Israel defense force -- or IDF -- is going about evicting the settlers, and the challenges ahead, we turn to Israeli Brig. Gen. Michael Herzog. Until last July, he was a top aide to Israel's defense minister. And before that, he was head of the IDF's Strategic Planning Division. He's currently on leave as a visiting fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Gen. Herzog, welcome.

BRIG. GEN. MICHAEL HERZOG: Good evening.

MARGARET WARNER: Is this the level of resistance you expected?

BRIG. GEN. MICHAEL HERZOG: Well, until now I think it's less than what was expected; the fear was that would see much more physical violence on the ground. Until now I understand that the overwhelming majority of the settlers decided not to resist violently, not to use physical violence. There are verbal -- there's verbal violence; there's some minor physical incidents on the ground but not at the level that was feared and expected. I also point out that the hard core settlements are still ahead of us, and once the forces will get there it might be tougher than what we've seen until now.

MARGARET WARNER: Than what we've just seen. How did the IDF get ready for this?

BRIG. GEN. MICHAEL HERZOG: Well, the first element was to amass enough forces. The IDF and the Israeli police amassed over 40,000 troops on the ground, 42,000 troops on the ground plus a back-up force of 13,000; that's over 55,000 troops, it's a huge force, it's twice the size of the force that we used in order to conquer the West Bank cities during the height of the intifada to dismantle their infrastructure.

Now, this force is tasked with removing the settlers, stopping disengagement opponents for disrupting daily life and disrupting the process itself, attacking Palestinians and so on, and responding to Palestinian terrorist activities should they occur during disengagement.

These forces were deployed on the ground in kind of six circles. The first is inside the settlement removing the settlers. The second circle is sealing off each settlement; the third is deployed on the roofs between settlements; the fourth on the border of the West Bank; fifth and sixth are supposed to respond to Palestinian terrorism.

Israeli Soldiers and the Settlers They Faced

MARGARET WARNER: What are the rules of engagement that these soldiers are operating under?

BRIG. GEN. MICHAEL HERZOG: The soldiers who are operating inside the settlements, those who are evacuating the settlers are unarmed and under strict orders not to use violence unless violence is used against them. They can remove the people physically but not use violence against them.

In order to use violence or let's say to use special measures that you need in order to deal with such a violent situation they need special authorization for senior officers and also special forces whose task is to deal with extreme situations like the use of firearms, explosives, like people besieging themselves in their own homes, threatening to set fire or to commit suicide acts and so on, so there are special forces ready for that eventuality.

MARGARET WARNER: We've seen some footage of soldiers actually crying as they were doing this. How difficult is it for these soldiers?

BRIG. GEN. MICHAEL HERZOG: I think it's very difficult for the soldiers. For one thing they have not been trained for this kind of a mission.

MARGARET WARNER: They have not been trained for this?

BRIG. GEN. MICHAEL HERZOG: They have been trained to fight a war to, chase terrorists; they have not been trained evacuate people from their homes. Now, of course they were given specific training for this mission. But I don't think any training can really prepare you emotionally for the scenes we've just seen on the screen of people crying and saying you are taking me out of my home against my will, and so on and so forth. So it's going to be very difficult for those soldiers on the ground and I really don't envy them.

MARGARET WARNER: How many soldiers refused to participate? We heard early on that lots of them might.

BRIG. GEN. MICHAEL HERZOG: Well, this was a source of concern; I can say I talked about 55,000 troops being involved. Until now we've had about 150 cases of refusal or people asking to be discharged of this mission. So I think given the size of the forces, the amount of the forces and the emotional stress that's involved in the debate in Israel itself, this is not a major problem. I don't expect that any unit will disintegrate because that have or that this will really undermine the mission.

MARGARET WARNER: We heard settlers today essentially acknowledging they couldn't stop the eviction. If so, what do you understand their strategy to be?

BRIG. GEN. MICHAEL HERZOG: The initial strategy was to try to stop it by getting tens of thousands of people into the settlements to make it impossible to remove the settlers. They failed in that.

MARGARET WARNER: Because you blocked that.

BRIG. GEN. MICHAEL HERZOG: Yeah. They then tried to block all the routes, the exit -- entry and exit routes into Gaza and out of Gaza; they failed in that, too. My feeling is that currently the major strategy of most of them is to traumatize the experience as much as possible; they know they can't stop it. They want to traumatize it so that any future government in Israel will think twice and three times before deciding about removing settlements. Some of them are fighting the next battle, the battle over the West Bank.

Palestinian Reaction and the Mission's Duration

MARGARET WARNER: Now the Palestinians so far, there's been no violence from them. Are you surprised by that and is the idea of working with the Palestinian Authority to try to control any outbreak like that?

BRIG. GEN. MICHAEL HERZOG: I'm not surprised. There is coordination to the IDF and Palestinian forces. Currently, there are two joint operations; one is operating in the passages in northern Gaza and southern Gaza. But I think for Palestinians they understand that -- let's say the militant groups, they understand that if they do anything now, they

will be accused of delaying the Israeli pullout. They understand that the majority of the Palestinian population doesn't want that right now. For their own domestic consideration they decided to remain quiet and they are quiet. Having said, that I would like to mention that over the next -- last 24 hours, a suicide bombing attack was exposed near one of the Gaza settlements, Neve Dekalim, which we have just seen, so I don't want to imagine what would happen if that would materialize.

MARGARET WARNER: And briefly how long will this operation take, the eviction?

BRIG. GEN. MICHAEL HERZOG: Originally it was planned up to four weeks. Now given the current pace over 50 percent of settlements and people have left, so I'd say could take as much as up to the end of next week. And then we have the settlements in the West Bank.

MARGARET WARNER: And then the military is still going to dismantle the military infrastructure before you turn it over?

BRIG. GEN. MICHAEL HERZOG: The military will remain behind for about four to six weeks and destroy all the remaining infrastructure or remove it.

MARGARET WARNER: All right. Gen. Herzog, thank you so much.

BRIG. GEN. MICHAEL HERZOG: Thank you.

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