

# Gaza Pullout Set to Begin Monday

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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The following is a transcript from the Washington Post online.

Israel began its planned pullout from the Gaza Strip on today, despite internal opposition highlighted by the recent resignation of Benjamin Netanyahu from his position as finance minister. Netanyahu and the Likud party oppose Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to evacuate 8,500 settlers in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank. What does Sharon hope to achieve with the Gaza pullout? Will this move significantly improve relations with Palestine?

David Makovsky, director of the Project on the Middle East Peace Process at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, was online Monday, Aug. 15, at 11 a.m. ET to discuss the Gaza pullout and what it means for Arab-Israeli relations.

Lowell, Mass.: Why cannot both sides live together in peace?

So much of the current conflict centers around both sides wanting to oust the other - and maintain political and economic control.

What really would happen to Israel if the Arab majority were allowed to surface?

"By my separatist motives, why cannot I see that I'm putting into exile both my neighbor and me?"

David Makovsky: It would take a dissertation to answer your question. Israeli liberal statesman Abba Eban liked to say the Arabs never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity for peace, going back to the Peel Commission of 1937 and the UN Partition Plan of 1947, all predicated upon the concept of dividing the land for the benefit of both peoples. Arabs have their complaints against Israel, as well. The two state solution is the only way. The idea of a one state solution is a chimera. The two sides do not speak the same language, each have been traumatized by the other: terror has traumatized Israel and occupation has traumatized the Palestinians.

Washington, D.C.: In a recent piece, you mentioned the need for the Palestinian Authority to "neutralize Hamas and other militant groups with a new political and economic strategy," to solidify legitimacy/control in the Gaza Strip. Besides security issues, this also included provision of essential services. How has the progress been in recent months of PA efforts on these fronts, and on obtaining cooperation and assistance from Gulf states? How will the current state of the PA in these areas affect the outcome of the pullout?

David Makovsky: Very good question. In dealing with Hamas, it seems to me you need to compete with their success in offering public services. Hamas's success is partly due to its ability to offer day care in mosques, health services,

and education .The new Palestinian Labor Minister Hassan Abu Libdeh has embarked upon an effort to ensure that Hamas is not the vehicle for social services. He has started a welfare fund, locating needy Palestinians.

In terms of support, Gulf Arab support has been paltry. The G-8 just announced in Scotland last month that it would provide \$9 Billion over the next few years. However, despite a windfall in oil prices over the last couple of years the entire Arab contribution to the Palestinian Authority stood at a paltry \$107 million in 2004. Arabs privately admit that they are embarrassed by this, but so far, to no avail. The one exception to the rule has been the donation of the Sheikh Zayed township in Gaza donated by the United Arab Emirates. Another such township has just been announced by the heir of Sheikh Zayed, Sheikh Khalifa. Dozens of such projects are needed. Much more needs to be done.

Northern Virginia: Good morning.

What will happen to the settlements left by the Israelis? Who will occupy them and who determines that?

Thanks.

David Makovsky: Good morning, Northern Virginia.

With the assistance of economic envoy James Wolfensohn, the parties have reached an agreement to destroy the settlements, enabling the Palestinians to use the material in a matter that is better suited for their needs. Given the density of Gaza, Palestinians did not think single-family unit housing was much beneficial, so an agreement was reached.

Cleveland, Ohio: Has the Palestinian Authority published any concrete plans for Gaza in the wake of Israel's pullout? By this I mean, development, infrastructure, etc. Or, does it appear it will be "business as usual"?

David Makovsky: I mentioned Wolfensohn. Until a couple of months ago, he was head of the World Bank. The World Bank wants to coordinate a quick infusion of assistance, in order to persuade Palestinians that their lives are improving and in order to provide labor-intensive construction and infrastructure jobs. As mentioned above, the G-8 states in Scotland last month pledged \$9 Billion in assistance in the coming few years. This should make an enormous difference. However, if the security situation deteriorates by Hamas, Islamic Jihad or other groups seeking to provoke Israeli retaliation by firing rockets into Israel, the international community will be wary of making such a major investment. Security is critical.

Lindenhurst, N.Y.: The world wants Israel to give back territory to the Arabs, now called Palestinians after winning the land in at least two wars that the Arabs started. Can you name two countries in history that gave back territory it had conquered to opponents who still wanted to destroy them?

David Makovsky: I mentioned Abba Eban's line above. Indeed, under Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian national movement did not have a leadership that was focused on reconciliation with Israel or else the Palestinians would have long ago won their state. Israel's problem however is that countries that have won territory also enfranchise the citizenry. Israel never annexed the West Bank and Gaza, because they did not want to annex the Palestinians as Israeli citizenry. This is because Israel wants to remain a democratic and Jewish state. Bottom line: you cannot just look at the land issue without looking at what is to be done with the people living on the land. This explains why Israel is leaving Gaza. In this instance, Israel has decided that demography trumps geography.

Poland, Maine: Does this mean that no Palestinians will be allowed to live in Israel?

David Makovsky: There are over one million Israeli Arabs who are Israeli citizens, living primarily in northern Israel. They are fully represented in the Israeli Knesset by Israeli Arab members. Their status does not change.

In terms of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza, there are some who work in Israel, but this is being

increasingly regulated.

Alexandria, Va.: Hi Mr. Makovsky,

How much money is Israel requesting from the U.S. for the Gaza withdrawal? It seems to me that Israelis should foot the bill for this move since it's not only a unilateral decision but Israel has received a "peace dividend" from the U.S. invasion of Iraq (i.e., which has eliminated a threat to Israel). It also seems that there will be at least some offset for Israel's defense costs by no longer having to defend pockets of settlers, roads, etc. within Gaza. I'm also not too keen on seeing a request to the U.S. to pay for this withdrawal in light of the AIPAC scandal.

David Makovsky: Israeli officials say the pullout will cost the Israeli taxpayers over \$2 billion, which equals a third of all Israeli government outlays for health care and half of Israel's education bill.

Regarding Israel's request from the US, it is clear that the money will not be earmarked for settler compensation since the US has opposed settlements. It will focus more in helping Israel with the cost of redeploying the Israeli army and helping shift Israeli development priorities away from the West Bank and Gaza and focused on less developed parts of Israel, like the northern Galilee and southern Negev. The Bush Administration has agreed in principle to be of assistance, but has not yet embraced a specific figure. However, since Gaza is where almost 40% of where all local Palestinians live, disengagement is a major boost to a two-state solution which is a major foreign policy objective of Republicans and Democrats, alike.

Washington, D.C.: From a political standpoint, does the Arab League's largely cosmetic assistance to the Palestinian Authority reflect their internal needs to have Israel as a boogeyman that deflects citizen anger with their corrupt and inefficient autocracies?

David Makovsky: This seems to be the view of Sen. Joe Biden who assailed the Arab states during a recent Senate Foreign Relations Committee for being "phony" in their professed concern for the Palestinians, suggesting they want to do as you say. It may also be that since these countries are not democracies, they are not faced with the need to be publicly accountable for their professed concern.

Washington, D.C.: The evacuation is not even a day old and already there are reports that the Palestinians are preparing to move in thousands of PLO terrorists from Lebanon to Gaza. In other words Israel is expelling 9000 of its own citizens to be replaced by those who want nothing more than to destroy this state and actively work to do so. Does this factor into the "demographic reality" that you and other supporters are constantly trotting out as the primary reason for withdrawal?

David Makovsky: Clearly, if Gaza is a source of instability, the Israeli military will not stand idly by. It will retaliate to protect its citizenry. It believes however that it is more suited to do so, when it also does not have to divert thousands of soldiers to protect 8,000 settlers living among 1.2 million Palestinians, at the same time.

Prague, Czech Republic: What's this about some group in the Gaza Strip claiming to be "al-Qaeda in Palestine"? My neighbor, just back from a month visiting family in the West Bank, rolls his eyes - you can write anything on the Web, he says, which is of course true.

David Makovsky: Experts on terrorism have said Al-Qaeda is not based in the West Bank or Gaza.

Madison, Wis.: A cynic would say that the reluctance of the Arab nations to contribute any meaningful amount of aid to the "new" Palestine is a reflection of their ambivalence about peace with Israel. By giving monetary support to the Palestinian state, are the Arab states tacitly conceding the legitimacy of Israel, a concept they've long opposed? I apologize for the politically loaded question, but I appreciate your answer.

David Makovsky: This is possible, but it is also possible that the Arab states believe they "get credit" from fellow Arabs by merely making statements on Al-Jazeera or the UN General Assembly, so why lay out any money?

Washington, D.C.: I think we need to take a serious reexamination of Abba Eban's famous "Never miss an opportunity" statement. In fact, it is the Israelis who, starting in '67 when they failed to annex Yesha, and right on through to Oslo and the current egregious travesty, have consistently missed opportunities and turned positions of strength into weakness. Meanwhile the Arabs' plan to eliminate Israel, aided and abetted by Israel itself, remains right on course.

David Makovsky: What is the opportunity that Israel missed? To make 3.5 million Palestinians Israeli citizens by following your advice of annexation? If they did what you say, Israel would no longer be a Jewish and democratic state. I find it interesting that the critics of disengagement never come forward with how they would deal with the continued consequences of the status quo. Hamas would love the fact that under the course you advocate, the Jews would be a minority of all people in Israel, West Bank and Gaza by 2010. The Palestinians would certainly seek to equate Israel with other regimes where a minority controls a majority in a bid to delegitimize the entire Zionist enterprise. This could have a serious impact. In my view, the status quo is the victory for terror, since it means a one-state solution and the destruction of Israel.

Annandale, Va.: Why doesn't Israel just give back all of the land it has stolen? What's so complex about that? Or do you think maybe its just a ploy to expand the settlements in the West Bank?

David Makovsky: The Middle East is complex, and I disagree with your characterization of "stolen". With Egypt's Nasser moving troops to Israel's border in 1967, teaming up with Jordan's King Hussein, Israel won these areas in a defensive war. (There was no Palestinian state, since it was controlled by Jordan, whose annexation of the West Bank between 1948-1967 was only recognized by Britain and Pakistan.)

Israel yielded all of Sinai back to Egypt, and Jordan relinquished its claims to the West Bank. The settler issue has been a complicating factor, but frankly not the only complicating factor since Barak was willing to dismantle several dozen of West Bank settlements in 2000. I mentioned above the lack of leadership by Arafat to take on his rejectionists.

In terms of the West Bank now, hopefully a quiet Gaza in the aftermath of Gaza withdrawal will embolden moderates on both sides regarding the future. Indeed, Sharon now speaks about only 8% of the West Bank--settlement blocs near the pre-67 lines--and Bill Clinton hoped that 5% of the West Bank (offset by territorial swaps) would be the ceiling. Therefore, the debate has changed partly due to Sharon's view. The key is for Abbas to confront his rejectionists, or else we might not get back to 2000.

Washington, D.C.: Can anyone visit the former settlements next week or later?

David Makovsky: Israel has termed it a closed military zone.

Cincinnati, Ohio: Has Israel reserved the right and will it maintain the capacity to reenter Gaza militarily if necessary to prevent it becoming a staging ground for future attacks?

David Makovsky: Yes, it has reserved the right of self-defense if attacked.

Laurel, Md.: What are the goals of Palestinian Arabs? Do you really think that there is some magical solution that would make them satisfied and stop the terror? My father lived in Israel for 5 years and he says that Palestinians so much rely on Israeli economy for jobs and products that he can't imagine what would they do if Israel simply disappears (and that's what Palestinians want).

Also, I think that the Gaza pullout is the right, albeit painful for many Israelis, move.

David Makovsky: I mentioned above the importance of jobs, including labor-intensive construction and much needed infrastructure. This is particularly true since Israel is seeking to regulate access to its territory due to the over 100 suicide bombings of the last few years.

Re: Abbas' intentions, he won on a platform that terror is counter-productive to Palestinian nationalist aspirations. This is something that Arafat pointedly refused to do. Now, this must be translated to both competing (economically) and confronting Hamas, who want to wreck all prospects for a two-state solution.

Washington, D.C.: Is there any way for the Gaza Pullout to NOT be billed as a victory for the Palestinians? While I believe it is the right thing to do at this time, what precautions/media work is being done to ensure that this does not create more terrorist attacks from people who believe the murder of innocent Israeli civilians has finally paid off?

David Makovsky: Please see my answer above, as one cannot just weigh the risks of action without weighing the risks of inaction. Status quo = one state solution = Greater Palestine = destruction of Israel.

As I also answered above, Israel reserves the right to retaliate if it is self-defense.

McLean, Va.: Is there any chance for a common ground between the Israelis and Palestinians, similar to the baseball diplomacy attempted between the U.S. and Cuba?

David Makovsky: Sports competition would be good, and it is interesting that it was an Israeli Arab team in Sakhnin that won Israel's soccer championship this year.

In general, unlike with Castro's Cuba, Israeli and Palestinian security officials hold regular contact.

Washington, D.C.: When some Israelis say that the land in Gaza was given to them by God, what are they referring to?

David Makovsky: I still have several questions waiting, but time is up. I am sorry if I did not get to you, and hope there will be other opportunities.

Thanks everyone for your questions.

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