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The Sharon Unilateral Disengagement Plan

Source: *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Summer 2004), pp. 85-107

Published by: [University of California Press](#) on behalf of the [Institute for Palestine Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jps.2004.33.4.085>

Accessed: 09/03/2015 17:34

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Prime Minister Sharon's disengagement plan was drawn up in close consultation with the United States as of early February 2004, with the participation of teams of U.S. advisers (National Security Council Middle East Adviser Elliott Abrams, Assistant Secretary of State William Burns, and Deputy National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley) and Israeli advisers (Sharon's Chief of Staff Dov Weisglass and National Security Adviser Giora Eiland) shuttling between Washington and Jerusalem to hammer out successive drafts. The Israeli team also met with Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, and there were higher level consultations between Israel's defense minister and foreign minister with VP Dick Cheney, Powell, and Rice.

Journal of Palestine Studies XXXIII, no. 4 (Summer 2004), pages 85-107.
ISSN: 0377-919X; online ISSN: 1533-8614.
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Journals Division, 2000 Center St., Ste. 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223.

A comprehensive draft was presented by Weisglass and Eiland on 23 March, at which time additional U.S. compensation for withdrawal was also discussed.

While Bush and Sharon portrayed the plan as a vehicle for implementing the U.S.-drafted road map and realizing Bush's June 2002 vision of a two-state solution (see Doc. C1 in JPS 125), the plan in fact brings Bush's vision into line with Israel's interpretation of the road map as outlined in its road map reservations of 27 May 2003 (see Special Doc. G in JPS 128)—no movement until there is a "new and different" Palestinian leadership that renounces the right of return, dismantles "terrorist organizations," and halts all Palestinian violence everywhere; attention paid only to "performance benchmarks" and not timelines; easing of Palestinian conditions only if Israel deems that "security conditions" allow; and no discussion of any final status issues during the interim period.

Bush's endorsement of Sharon's unilateral disengagement plan marked a major policy change for the United States. His letter to Sharon formally drops all pretense of the United States serving as impartial mediator of a negotiated settlement between Israel and the Palestinians and instead constitutes official U.S. acceptance of Israel's positions on such final status issues as Jerusalem, borders, settlements, and refugees. In his letter, Bush also pledged to block any alternative peace initiatives (including presumably the Geneva Initiative; see Special Doc. in JPS 130).

The extent of the president's endorsement of the plan is perhaps best expressed in a declaration he made to a Washington audience on 21 April: "In my judgment, the whole world should have said, 'Thank you, Ariel. Now we have a chance to begin the construction of a peaceful Palestinian state.'"

A. ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER ARIEL SHARON, LETTER TO U.S. PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH PRESENTING THE DISENGAGEMENT PLAN, PRESENTED IN WASHINGTON, 14 APRIL 2004.

Prime Minister Sharon's letter to President Bush (like Bush's letter to Sharon) was the result of close collaboration between U.S. and Israeli officials, with successive drafts being fine-tuned at meetings both in Israel and in Washington. The U.S. team involved in formulating the two letters was led by National Security Council Middle East Adviser Elliott Abrams, Assistant Secretary of State William Burns, and Deputy National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley, while those most involved on the Israeli side were Sharon's Chief of Staff Dov Weisglass, National Security Adviser Giora Eiland, and Foreign Policy Adviser Shalom Turjeman. Sharon's reiterated acceptance of the road map "as adopted by our government" is a reference to Israel's reservations to the road map (see Special Doc. G in JPS 128), as mentioned in the introduction above. The text was taken from the Israeli Foreign Ministry Web site at www.mfa.gov.il.

Dear Mr. President,

The vision that you articulated in your 24 June 2002 address constitutes one of the most significant contributions toward ensuring a bright future for the Middle East.

Accordingly, the State of Israel has accepted the road map, as adopted by our government. For the first time, a practical and just formula was presented for the achievement of peace, opening a genuine window of opportunity for progress toward a settlement between Israel and the Palestinians, involving two states living side-by-side in peace and security.

This formula sets forth the correct sequence and principles for the attainment of peace. Its full implementation represents the sole means to make genuine progress. As you have stated, a Palestinian state will never be created by terror, and Palestinians must engage in a sustained fight against the terrorists and dismantle their infrastructure. Moreover, there must be serious efforts to institute true reform and real democracy and liberty, including new leaders not compromised by terror. We are committed to this formula as the only avenue through which an agreement can be reached. We believe that this formula is the only viable one.

The Palestinian Authority under its current leadership has taken no action to meet its responsibilities under the road map. Terror has not ceased, reform of the Palestinian security services has not been undertaken, and real institutional reforms have not taken place. The State of Israel continues to pay the heavy cost of constant terror. Israel must preserve its capability to protect itself and deter its enemies, and we thus retain our right to defend ourselves against terrorism and to take actions against terrorist organizations.

Having reached the conclusion that, for the time being, there exists no Palestinian partner with whom to advance peacefully toward a settlement and since the current impasse is unhelpful to the achievement of our shared goals, I have decided to initiate a process of gradual disengagement with the hope of reducing friction between Israelis and Palestinians. The Disengagement plan is designed to improve security for Israel and stabilize our political and economic situation. It will enable us to deploy our forces more effectively until such time that conditions in the Palestinian Authority allow for the full implementation of the road map to resume.

I attach, for your review, the main principles of the Disengagement plan. This initiative, which we are not undertaking under the road map, represents an independent Israeli plan, yet is not inconsistent with the road map. According to this plan, the State of Israel intends to relocate military installations and all Israeli villages and towns in the Gaza Strip, as well as other military installations and a small number of villages in Samaria.

In this context, we also plan to accelerate construction of the security fence, whose completion is essential in order to ensure the security of the citizens of Israel. The fence is a security rather than political barrier, temporary rather than permanent, and therefore will not prejudice any final status issues including final borders. The route of the fence, as approved by our government's decisions, will take into account, consistent with security needs, its impact on Palestinians not engaged in terrorist activities.

Upon my return from Washington, I expect to submit this plan for the approval of the cabinet and the Knesset, and I firmly believe that it will win such approval.

The Disengagement plan will create a new and better reality for the State of Israel, enhance its security and economy, and strengthen the fortitude of its people. In this context, I believe it is important to bring new opportunities to the Negev and the Galilee. Additionally, the plan will entail a series of measures with the inherent potential to

improve the lot of the Palestinian Authority, providing that it demonstrates the wisdom to take advantage of this opportunity. The execution of the Disengagement plan holds the prospect of stimulating positive changes within the Palestinian Authority that might create the necessary conditions for the resumption of direct negotiations.

We view the achievement of a settlement between Israel and the Palestinians as our central focus and are committed to realizing this objective. Progress toward this goal must be anchored exclusively in the road map, and we will oppose any other plan.

In this regard, we are fully aware of the responsibilities facing the State of Israel. These include limitations on the growth of settlements; removal of unauthorized outposts; and steps to increase, to the extent permitted by security needs, freedom of movement for Palestinians not engaged in terrorism. Under separate cover we are sending to you a full description of the steps the State of Israel is taking to meet all its responsibilities.

The government of Israel supports the United States's efforts to reform the Palestinian security services to meet their road map obligations to fight terror. Israel also supports the Americans' efforts, working with the international community, to promote the reform process, build institutions, and improve the economy of the Palestinian Authority and to enhance the welfare of its people, in the hope that a new Palestinian leadership will prove able to fulfill its obligations under the road map.

I want to again express my appreciation for your courageous leadership in the war against global terror, your important initiative to revitalize the Middle East as a more fitting home for its people, and, primarily, your personal friendship and profound support for the State of Israel.

B. U.S. PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH, LETTER TO ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER ARIEL SHARON ON THE DISENGAGEMENT PLAN, WASHINGTON, 14 APRIL 2004.

Of the two letters exchanged on 14 April, Bush's was without doubt the one whose formulation required the most careful attention. The importance Israel attached to the U.S. president's letter, particularly the points of "reassurance," was such that Sharon delayed his takeoff to Washington until he had seen and was satisfied with the final draft. The text of the letter was taken from the Israeli Foreign Ministry Web site at www.mfa.gov.il.

It is useful to compare George W. Bush's letter of assurances to Prime Minister Sharon to the U.S. letter of assurances to the Palestinians drawn up by his father's administration just before the Madrid peace conference in mid-October 1991 (see JPS Special Document I.A in JPS 82). The 1991 letter states, inter alia, "The United States is opposed to the Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem and extension of Israeli law on it and the extension of Jerusalem's municipal boundaries," and "the United States has opposed and will continue to oppose settlement activity in the territories occupied in 1967 which remain an obstacle to peace."

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

Thank you for your letter setting out your disengagement plan.

The United States remains hopeful and determined to find a way forward toward a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. I remain committed to my 24 June 2002

vision of two states living side by side in peace and security as the key to peace, and to the road map as the route to get there.

We welcome the disengagement plan you have prepared, under which Israel would withdraw certain military installations and all settlements from Gaza, and withdraw certain military installations and settlements in the West Bank. These steps described in the plan will mark real progress toward realizing my 24 June 2002 vision, and make a real contribution toward peace. We also understand that, in this context, Israel believes it is important to bring new opportunities to the Negev and the Galilee. We are hopeful that steps pursuant to this plan, consistent with my vision, will remind all states and parties of their own obligations under the road map.

The United States appreciates the risks such an undertaking represents. I therefore want to reassure you on several points.

First, the United States remains committed to my vision and to its implementation as described in the road map. The United States will do its utmost to prevent any attempt by anyone to impose any other plan. Under the road map, Palestinians must undertake an immediate cessation of armed activity and all acts of violence against Israelis anywhere, and all official Palestinian institutions must end incitement against Israel. The Palestinian leadership must act decisively against terror, including sustained, targeted, and effective operations to stop terrorism and dismantle terrorist capabilities and infrastructure. Palestinians must undertake a comprehensive and fundamental political reform that includes a strong parliamentary democracy and an empowered prime minister.

Second, there will be no security for Israelis or Palestinians until they and all states, in the region and beyond, join together to fight terrorism and dismantle terrorist organizations. The United States reiterates its steadfast commitment to Israel's security, including secure, defensible borders, and to preserve and strengthen Israel's capability to deter and defend itself, by itself, against any threat or possible combination of threats.

Third, Israel will retain its right to defend itself against terrorism, including to take actions against terrorist organizations. The United States will lead efforts, working together with Jordan, Egypt, and others in the international community, to build the capacity and will of Palestinian institutions to fight terrorism, dismantle terrorist organizations, and prevent the areas from which Israel has withdrawn from posing a threat that would have to be addressed by any other means. The United States understands that after Israel withdraws from Gaza and/or parts of the West Bank, and pending agreements on other arrangements, existing arrangements regarding control of airspace, territorial waters, and land passages of the West Bank and Gaza will continue.

The United States is strongly committed to Israel's security and well-being as a Jewish state. It seems clear that an agreed, just, fair, and realistic framework for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue as part of any final status agreement will need to be found through the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the settling of Palestinian refugees there, rather than in Israel.

As part of a final peace settlement, Israel must have secure and recognized borders, which should emerge from negotiations between the parties in accordance with UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338. In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli populations centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of

1949, and all previous efforts to negotiate a two-state solution have reached the same conclusion. It is realistic to expect that any final status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities.

I know that, as you state in your letter, you are aware that certain responsibilities face the State of Israel. Among these, your government has stated that the barrier being erected by Israel should be a security rather than political barrier, should be temporary rather than permanent, and therefore not prejudice any final status issues including final borders, and its route should take into account, consistent with security needs, its impact on Palestinians not engaged in terrorist activities.

As you know, the United States supports the establishment of a Palestinian state that is viable, contiguous, sovereign, and independent, so that the Palestinian people can build their own future in accordance with my vision set forth in June 2002 and with the path set forth in the road map. The United States will join with others in the international community to foster the development of democratic political institutions and new leadership committed to those institutions, the reconstruction of civic institutions, the growth of a free and prosperous economy, and the building of capable security institutions dedicated to maintaining law and order and dismantling terrorist organizations.

A peace settlement negotiated between Israelis and Palestinians would be a great boon not only to those peoples but to the peoples of the entire region. Accordingly, the United States believes that all states in the region have special responsibilities: to support the building of the institutions of a Palestinian state; to fight terrorism, and cut off all forms of assistance to individuals and groups engaged in terrorism; and to begin now to move toward more normal relations with the State of Israel. These actions would be true contributions to building peace in the region.

Mr. Prime Minister, you have described a bold and historic initiative that can make an important contribution to peace. I commend your efforts and your courageous decision which I support. As a close friend and ally, the United States intends to work closely with you to help make it a success.

C. KEY PRINCIPLES OF PRIME MINISTER ARIEL SHARON'S UNILATERAL DISENGAGEMENT PLAN, PRESENTED IN WASHINGTON, 14 APRIL 2004.

Prime Minister Sharon presented the key principles of the disengagement plan as an appendix to his letter to President Bush. While the document sketches out the scope of disengagement, it provides neither a timetable nor any details as to the mechanics of implementing settlement evacuation, troop withdrawal, the disposition of Israeli assets left behind, etc. Most of these points are still under discussion among Israel's security officials (led by Eiland, whom Sharon has charged with handling the details), and it is questionable whether Sharon has discussed them with his inner security cabinet, much less the United States. As Secretary of State Colin Powell acknowledged after his 15 May meeting with Palestinian PM Ahmad Qurai', "frankly, we have to wait to see what the proposal actually is."

Among the more noteworthy "principles" laid out in the document are the explicit statement that implementation will obviate "claims" that Israel has responsibility

for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip (I.F.) and that following implementation, there can be “no basis for the claim” that Gaza is occupied territory (II.A.2.). Another clause, however, affirms ongoing Israeli control of the land borders, airspace, and sea off Gaza (III.A.1) and reserves the right to respond to and preempt “threats” inside Gaza (III.A.3). The text was taken from the Israeli Foreign Ministry Web site at www.mfa.gov.il.

I. Overview

Israel is committed to the peace process and aspires to reach a mutual agreement on the basis of two states for two peoples, the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people and a Palestinian state for the Palestinian people, as part of the realization of President [George W.] Bush’s vision.

Israel believes that it must act to improve the current reality. Israel has come to the conclusion that at present, there is no Palestinian partner with whom it is possible to make progress on a bilateral agreement. In light of this, a unilateral disengagement plan has been formulated, which is based on the following considerations:

A. The stagnation inherent in the current situation is harmful. In order to emerge from this stagnation, Israel must initiate a move that will not be contingent on Palestinian cooperation.

B. The plan will lead to a better security reality, at least in the long term.

C. In any future final status agreement, there will be no Israeli settlement in the Gaza Strip. However, it is clear that in Judea and Samaria, some areas will remain part of the State of Israel, among them civilian settlements, military zones, and places where Israel has additional interests.

D. The exit from the Gaza Strip and from the area of northern Samaria (four settlements and military installations in their environs) will reduce friction with the Palestinian population and has the potential to improve the fabric of Palestinian life and the Palestinian economy.

E. Israel hopes that the Palestinians will have the sense to take advantage of the disengagement move in order to exit the cycle of violence and rejoin the process of dialogue.

F. The disengagement move will obviate the claims about Israel with regard to its responsibility for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

G. The disengagement move does not detract from the existing agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. The existing arrangements will continue to prevail.

When there is evidence on the Palestinian side of the willingness, ability, and actual realization of a fight against terror and of the implementation of the reforms stipulated in the road map, it will be possible to return to the track of negotiations and dialogue.

II. Main Points of the Plan

A. The Gaza Strip

1. Israel will evacuate the Gaza Strip, including all the Israeli settlements currently existing there, and will redeploy outside the territory of the Strip. This, apart from military deployment along the border line between the Gaza Strip and Egypt (“Philadelphi Route”), will be detailed below.

2. Upon completion of the move, no permanent Israeli civilian or military presence in the areas that are evacuated in the continental expanse of the Gaza Strip will remain.

As a result, there will be no basis for the claim that the Gaza Strip is occupied territory.

B. Judea and Samaria

1. Israel will evacuate the area of northern Samaria (Ganim, Qadim, Homesh, and Sanur) and all the permanent military installations in this area, and will redeploy outside the evacuated area.

2. Upon completion of the move, no permanent presence of Israeli military forces and Israeli civilians in the area of northern Samaria will remain.

3. The move will enable Palestinian territorial contiguity in the area of northern Samaria.

4. Israel will improve the transportation infrastructure in Judea and Samaria with the aim of enabling Palestinian transportation contiguity in Judea and Samaria.

5. The move will make Palestinian economic and commercial activity easier in Judea and Samaria.

C. The Security Fence

Israel will continue to build the security fence, in accordance with the relevant government decisions. The route will take humanitarian considerations into account.

III. Security Reality after the Evacuation

A. The Gaza Strip

1. Israel will supervise and guard the external envelope on land, will maintain exclusive control in the air space of Gaza, and will continue to conduct military activities in the sea space of the Gaza Strip.

2. The Gaza Strip will be demilitarized and devoid of armaments, the presence of which is not in accordance with the existing agreements between the sides.

3. Israel reserves for itself the basic right of self-defense, including taking preventative steps as well as responding by using force against threats that will emerge from the Gaza Strip.

B. Judea and Samaria

1. Upon evacuation of the settlements from northern Samaria (Ganim, Qadim, Homesh, and Sanur), no permanent military presence will remain in their environs.

2. Israel reserves for itself the basic right of self-defense, including taking of preventative steps as well as responding with force against threats that emerge from this area.

3. In the rest of the Judea and Samaria territories, existing security activity will continue. However, in accordance with the circumstances, Israel will consider reducing its activity in Palestinian cities.

4. Israel will work toward reducing the number of checkpoints in Judea and Samaria as a whole.

IV. Military Installations and Infrastructures in the Gaza Strip and the Northern Samaria Area

In general, they will be dismantled and evacuated, except for those that Israel will decide to leave in place and transfer to a body that will be determined.

V. The Nature of Military Aid to the Palestinians

Israel agrees that, in coordination with it, advice, aid, and instruction will be given to Palestinian security forces for the purpose of fighting terror and maintaining public order by American, British, Egyptian, Jordanian or other experts, as will be agreed upon by Israel.

Israel insists that there will be no foreign security presence in the Gaza Strip and/or Judea and Samaria that is not in coordination with Israel and with Israel's agreement.

VI. The Border Area between the Gaza Strip and Egypt ("Philadelphi Route")

During the first stage, Israel will continue to maintain a military presence along the border line between the Gaza Strip and Egypt ("Philadelphi Route"). This presence is an essential security need, and in certain places, it is possible that there will be a need for the physical enlargement of the area in which the military activity will be carried out.

Later on, the possibility of evacuating this area will be considered. The evacuation of this area will be contingent on, among other things, the security reality and the extent of Egypt's cooperation in the creation of a more reliable arrangement.

If and when conditions emerge for the evacuation of this area, Israel will be prepared to examine the possibility of establishing a sea port and an airport in the Gaza Strip, subject to arrangements that will be determined with Israel.

VII. The Israeli Settlements

Israel will aspire to leave standing the real estate assets of the Israeli settlements. (Note: subject to the presence of an international body that will accept proprietorship as noted below.)

The transfer of Israeli economic activities to Palestinian use embodies within it a possibility for the expansion of Palestinian economic activity.

Israel proposes that an international body be established (on the model of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee; AHLC), to be agreed upon by the United States and Israel, which will receive possession from Israel of the settlements that remain and will appraise the value of all the assets.

Israel reserves for itself the right to ask for consideration of the economic value of the assets that will be left in the evacuated area.

VIII. Infrastructures and Civilian Arrangements

The water, electricity, sewage, and communications infrastructures that serve the Palestinians will be left in place.

Israel will aspire to leave in place the water, electricity, and sewage infrastructures that serve the Israeli settlements that will be evacuated.

As a rule, Israel will enable the continued supply of electricity, water, gas, and fuel to the Palestinians, under the existing arrangements.

The existing arrangements, including the arrangements with regard to water and the electromagnetic area, will remain valid.

IX. The Activity of the International Civilian Organizations

Israel views very favorably continued activity of the international humanitarian organizations and those that deal with civil development, which aid the Palestinian population.

Israel will coordinate with the international organizations the arrangements that will make this activity easier.

X. The Economic Arrangements

In general, the economic arrangements that are currently in effect between Israel and the Palestinians will remain valid. These arrangements include, among other things:

- A. The entry of workers into Israel in accordance with the existing criteria.
- B. The movement of goods between the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria, Israel, and foreign countries.
- C. The monetary regime.
- D. The taxation arrangements and the customs envelope.
- E. Postal and communications arrangements.

XI. The Erez Industrial Zone

The Erez Industrial Zone, which is located inside the Gaza Strip, employs approximately 4,000 Palestinian workers. The continued activity of the industrial zone is, above all, a definite Palestinian interest.

Israel will consider leaving the industrial zone in its current format under two conditions:

- A. The maintenance of appropriate security arrangements.
- B. An explicit recognition by the international community that the continued existence of the industrial zone in its current format will not be perceived as a continuation of Israeli control in the area.

Alternatively, the industrial zone will be transferred to the responsibility of an agreed-upon Palestinian or international element.

Israel will examine, together with Egypt, the possibility of establishing a joint industrial zone on the border of the Gaza Strip, Egypt, and Israel.

XII. The International Crossing Points

- A. The international crossing point between the Gaza Strip and Egypt:
 - 1. The existing arrangements will remain in force.
 - 2. Israel is interested in transferring the crossing point to the "border triangle," about two kilometers south of its current location; this will be done in coordination with the Egyptians. This will allow the expansion of the hours of activity at the crossing point.

- B. The international crossing points between Judea and Samaria, and Jordan:
 - The existing arrangements will remain in force.

XIII. The Erez Crossing Point

The Erez crossing point will be moved into the territory of the State of Israel according to a timetable that will be determined separately.

XIV. Timetable

The evacuation process is planned for completion by the end of 2005.

The stages of the evacuation and the detailed timetable will be made known to the Americans.

XV. Summary

Israel expects broad international support for the disengagement move. This support is essential in order to bring the Palestinians to actually implement what is incumbent upon them in the areas of fighting terror and the carrying out of the reforms according to the road map, at which time the sides will be able to return to negotiations.

D. ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE CHIEF OF STAFF DOV WEISGLASS, LETTER TO U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER CONDOLEEZZA RICE OUTLINING U.S.-ISRAELI UNDERSTANDINGS, JERUSALEM, 19 APRIL 2004.

In exchange for President Bush's endorsement of the Sharon plan, the U.S. administration reportedly required Israel to provide a follow-up letter outlining what was agreed during the private Bush-Sharon meeting on 14 April. The United States reportedly had wanted the letter to list in detail Israel's outstanding road map commitments (e.g., removing settlement outposts, easing restrictions on movement, improving humanitarian conditions), including a detailed timetable for implementation, as well as explicit assurances that settlement growth would be frozen and unauthorized outposts removed. The final letter provided by Weisglass, however, is much vaguer. Of note is the affirmation (paragraph 5.d) that Israel does not have to take any further steps unless there is a Palestinian government it finds acceptable. The text was published by the Israeli daily Ha'Aretz on 19 April.

Dear Dr. Rice,

On behalf of the prime minister of the State of Israel, Mr. Ariel Sharon, I wish to reconfirm the following understanding, which had been reached between us:

1. Restrictions on settlement growth: within the agreed principles of settlement activities, an effort will be made in the next few days to have a better definition of the construction line of settlements in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank]. An Israeli team, in conjunction with [U.S.] Ambassador [Dan] Kurtzer, will review aerial photos of settlements and will jointly define the construction line of each of the settlements.

2. Removal of unauthorized outposts: the prime minister and the minister of defense, jointly, will prepare a list of unauthorized outposts with indicative dates of their removal; the Israel Defense Forces and/or the Israeli police will take continuous action to remove those outposts in the targeted dates. The said list will be presented to Ambassador Kurtzer within 30 days.

3. Mobility restrictions in Judea and Samaria: the minister of defense will provide Ambassador Kurtzer with a map indicating roadblocks and other transportational barriers

posed across Judea and Samaria. A list of barriers already removed and a timetable for further removals will be included in this list. Needless to say, the matter of the existence of transportation barriers fully depends on the current security situation and might be changed accordingly.

4. Legal attachments of Palestinian revenues: the matter is pending in various courts of law in Israel, awaiting judicial decisions. We will urge the State Attorney's Office to take any possible legal measure to expedite the rendering of those decisions.

5. The Government of Israel extends to the Government of the United States the following assurances:

a. The Israeli government remains committed to the two-state solution—Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security—as the key to peace in the Middle East.

b. The Israeli government remains committed to the road map as the only route to achieving the two-state solution.

c. The Israeli government believes that its disengagement plan and related steps on the West Bank concerning settlement growth, unauthorized outposts, and easing of restrictions on the movement of Palestinians not engaged in terror are consistent with the road map and, in many cases, are steps actually called for in certain phases of the road map.

d. The Israeli government believes that further steps by it, even if consistent with the road map, cannot be taken absent the emergence of a Palestinian partner committed to peace, democratic reform, and the fight against terror.

e. Once such a Palestinian partner emerges, the Israeli government will perform its obligations, as called for in the road map, as part of the performance-based plan set out in the road map for reaching a negotiated final status agreement.

f. The Israeli government remains committed to the negotiation between the parties of a final status resolution of all outstanding issues.

g. The Government of Israel supports the United States' efforts to reform the Palestinian security services to meet their road map obligations to fight terror. Israel also supports the American efforts, working with the international community, to promote the reform process, build institutions, and improve the economy of the Palestinian Authority and to enhance the welfare of its people, in the hope that a new Palestinian leadership will prove able to fulfill its obligations under the road map. The Israeli government will take all reasonable actions requested by these parties to facilitate these efforts.

h. As the Government of Israel has stated, the barrier being erected by Israel should be a security rather than a political barrier, should be temporary rather than permanent, and therefore not prejudice any final status issues, including final borders, and its route should take into account, consistent with security needs, its impact on Palestinians not engaged in terrorist activities.

E. PA NEGOTIATION AFFAIRS M SAEB ERAKAT, "WHY DID BUSH TAKE MY JOB?" *WASHINGTON POST*, 25 APRIL 2004.

Erakat's op-ed to the Washington Post is the closest thing to an official Palestinian Authority statement on the disengagement plan made to date. Comments by PM Qurai' and other PA officials have been confined to saying that the PA welcomes any

Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian territory so long as it constitutes a step toward full withdrawal from all occupied Palestinian territories.

President Bush apparently has taken my job.

Until the Bush-Sharon press conference on 14 April, I was the chief negotiator for the Palestine Liberation Organization, the only internationally recognized entity that has a mandate to negotiate a permanent peace with Israel. But then Bush appeared on television, standing at the White House next to a beaming Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel, and announced that he had accepted Israel's claim to illegally occupied Palestinian land. He further determined that Palestinian refugees would never be allowed to return to their homes in Israel and would instead have to be resettled in a Palestinian state, vast tracts of which he had just given away.

In so doing, Bush reneged on the 1991 U.S. Letter of Assurances provided to the Palestinians by his father's administration; the letter said that "no party should take unilateral actions that seek to predetermine issues" and that "the United States has opposed and will continue to oppose settlement activity in the territories occupied in 1967." Bush, as the self-appointed Palestinian negotiator, finally exposed the "Middle East peace process" for the charade that it has become—a mechanism by which Israel and the United States impose a solution on the Palestinians.

In this era of unmatched and unchallenged U.S. power, Bush abandoned America's historical role as facilitator and mediator of Middle East peace and instead simply adopted the positions of an expansionist, right-wing government in Israel. It is mind-boggling that an American president, often citing the rule of law, would use the power of his position not to enforce international law against illegal Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory but instead to legitimize them as "currently existing Israeli population centers," thereby giving Israelis an incentive to build even more. It is mind-boggling that a president who supports equality and nondiscrimination would dismiss the rights of Christian and Muslim refugees to return to their homes in the "Jewish state"—a term often repeated but never defined or even left to the parties to negotiate. And it is mind-boggling that the leader of the free world, the president of a nation whose very existence is based on liberty and justice, would act so callously to deny liberty and justice to the Palestinian people.

The positions taken by Bush are completely contrary to, and thus seriously undermine, the expressed objectives of American policy of democratic reform in the Middle East. Freedom? Of course—unless you are a Palestinian, in which case your rights must be approved by Israel. The rule of law? Absolutely—unless you are Israel, in which case you need not concern yourself with UN resolutions, the Fourth Geneva Convention, international refugee law, or human rights treaties.

Accountability? Without a doubt—unless you are Ariel Sharon, in which case you may freely conduct assassinations, build walls and settlements, oppress an entire population, and then be rewarded with unquestioning support.

Bush wants to reform the Arab world while serving as the Washington franchise for an Israeli government bent on the expropriation of Palestinian land and the domination and humiliation of the Palestinian people. As long as the United States refuses to play an evenhanded role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as long as it continues to cede its

Middle East policy to the Israeli government, U.S. efforts to win the war on terrorism are seriously undermined.

Israel's non-negotiated disengagement from Gaza will cause many Palestinians to conclude that violence, and not negotiations, is the only option for securing their rights. The majority of Palestinians who support a peaceful, negotiated two-state solution now see that Palestinians are no longer even welcome at the negotiating table. Israel is now negotiating peace with the United States—not with the Palestinians. It is impossible to describe how deeply this has undermined Palestinian moderates, such as myself, who have continued to argue for a solution that is based on reconciliation and negotiation and not on revenge and retaliation.

The primary beneficiaries of these developments are extremist groups throughout the Middle East. The leaders of such groups could not have invented a better method of recruitment than the Bush-Sharon press conference. The reality is that as a result of the positions taken by the Bush administration, we are farther away from a permanent peace than we have ever been, and many innocent people on both sides will die in the coming months and years as a result.

My role as chief Palestinian negotiator may have been taken from me, but I retain my role as a Palestinian father. I am determined to teach my children that violence is not the answer. President Bush has not made my job any easier.

F. ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER ARIEL SHARON, OPEN LETTER TO THE LIKUD, *YEDI'OT AHARONOT*, 30 APRIL 2004.

Sharon's appeal to Likud voters to approve his unilateral disengagement plan provides a useful summary of the implications of Bush's letter of assurances, the U.S. commitments contained therein, and the overwhelming advantages to Israel of disengagement. Notwithstanding this, the Likud rejected the plan in a nonbinding vote on 2 May (with 60 percent voting against), though polls showed it to be widely popular with the Israeli public. Sharon vowed to move forward with his plan anyway, promising to consult with the party on slight revisions before sending it to his cabinet for approval. The open letter appeared in the Israeli daily Yedi'ot Aharonot on 30 April and was translated and published by Mideast Mirror the same day.

There are moments in a prime minister's life when tough decisions must be made, decisions about people's lives, the fate of the country, the future of the nation. These are not easy decisions, simple or convenient to make. These are the most difficult decisions a person can make, the decisions of leaders.

But leaders need the confidence of the people at moments like these; so I need your trust and faith in me, and the disengagement plan, which I formulated with all the security elements in Israel.

It is impossible to be in favor of me but against the plan I am leading, because those who want me, those who understand that only this way can I fulfill my promise and bring security and peace, those who believe in me, must vote in favor of the plan.

There is no other way.

In the last three years, the Palestinian terror organizations have been waging a difficult political and security campaign against us. The principle I have stood for from my first

day in office as prime minister is that the Palestinians must cease the terror before any progress in the political process.

We managed to persuade President Bush and after him most of the countries of the world of this principle, and that led to the road map. That is the reason that Arafat and his gangsters have foiled it. They want a freeze, paralysis. They want the killing on both sides to go on. They hope the political paralysis along with the terror will lead to the collapse and defeat of Israel.

They are wrong.

That is why I reached the conclusion that Israel must initiate a plan of its own—the disengagement plan, to foil the intentions of Arafat and his accomplices to defeat Israel through terror and external political pressure.

The disengagement plan is a grave blow to Arafat and the terror gangs. The fact is that Israel is leading a political initiative, which is acceptable to most of the countries of the world, which puts an end to the false Palestinian dreams about breaking Israel's spirit, and proves to them that time is working against them.

It's a punishment for Arafat and his terror gangs for choosing the way of terror. The disengagement plan is the only plan that exacts a steep political price from the Palestinians for their choice of terror and blood. That's why they object to it and hope the Israeli Right defeats it.

The disengagement plan is good for security. Israel will have more freedom of movement than ever before to go after the terror organizations. All the heads of the intelligence services reckon that terror will decline after the disengagement, but if terror continues, Israel will be able to operate inside Gaza, and this time with international backing.

Disengagement will allow us to build the security fence on a route that will encompass a maximum number of Israeli settlements, shortening the defensive lines of the country, reducing the ability of the terror gangs to hit inside Israel, and help the IDF and security forces to foil attacks. That's the immediate security gain from moving those settlements, which do not contribute anything to Israeli security.

As part of the disengagement plan, Israel received from the U.S., the greatest power in the world, explicit promises that the large Israeli settlement blocs, where most of the settlers reside, will remain forever in Israeli sovereignty. No more world debate about return to the 1967 borders, no more fear for the future of the large settlements.

Only the disengagement plan gives Israel something in the form of strengthening the Jewish settlements and protecting them. Those who want a strong Ariel, a strong Ma'ale Adumim, a strong Givat Ze'ev, a strong Gush Etzion, and a strong Jerusalem that is whole and united, must give up the handful of little, isolated settlements in Gaza, an area that Israel will ultimately never hold onto forever.

The disengagement plan guarantees Israel's future as a Jewish state. For the first time, the U.S. has promised that Palestinian refugees will not return to the state of Israel. No other political plan, not even those that made dangerous and farreaching concessions, has given Israel such a sweeping commitment, which guarantees Israel's existence as a Jewish state, and prevents Israel from being flooded by millions of Palestinian refugees.

It is important to understand that those interested in the great achievements the disengagement plan gives Israel, must support it. Those who want to prevent Israel from

being flooded by refugees, those who want to keep the large settlement blocs forever, those who want to make sure that as long as the Palestinians don't fight terror, there won't be any political pressure on Israel, those who accept the American guarantees and their backing for the war on terror, those who want Israel to take the initiative and not be dragged along, those who want Israel to lead and not be led, those who want all this—must be in favor of the disengagement plan. It's the only way.

I know that disengagement involves the enormous pain of leaving settlements. As someone who has spent my entire life defending the people of Israel, setting up settlements and strengthening them, and fulfilling our right to all of Eretz Yisrael. I know that we cannot remain in Gaza forever. We can't fulfill all our dreams. But I believe that through the means of disengagement, we can achieve most of them, and lead Israel to security and peace.

On Sunday the Likud membership will vote on my plan. I know the Likud membership. I was the one who created the Likud movement thirty years ago and I am the one who doubled its size in the last elections for the Knesset. I know the difficulties of the decision for all the Likud members. But I know the feeling of national responsibility and the sincere desire for peace in the hearts of all the Likud members.

I propose to every Likud member, before they go into the voting booth to devote some thought to what would happen if my plan doesn't pass. What will happen to Israel's status in the world, what the U.S. will do, how the rejection of the plan will affect the Likud's continued rule in Israel—and above all, how great a victory a defeat of the plan will be for Arafat and his gangsters and the Hamas.

To my regret, the extreme Right has twice brought down a Likud government, resulting in the rise of the Left and thus, with their own hands, they wrought dangerous political plans for Israel. We all remember how the Right brought down the Likud government headed by Yitzhak Shamir after the Madrid Conference, and that resulted in the Oslo plan. We also remember how those shouting nowadays against the disengagement brought down the Netanyahu government for signing the Wye Agreement, bringing Camp David, Taba, and the intifada to Israel.

Nowadays, too, we see how they attack and insult, but this time I am confident that the Likud membership won't let the Right bring down one of our governments for a third time.

The Likud wants to survive so it won't let those who aren't even members destroy it.

I am a believer in the Likud and its members. I am convinced a large majority of Likud members will prove the Likud is a responsible movement, and that only it can lead Israel to quiet, security, and peace.

G. QUARTET STATEMENT ON THE SHARON DISENGAGEMENT PLAN, NEW YORK, 4 MAY 2004.

After a week of discussions on how to respond to the Sharon plan held among lower-level Quartet officials in New York, senior Quartet representatives gathered at the UN to issue the following statement, the contradictions of which reflect the underlying opposition of the EU, Russia, and UN to the one-sided nature of the plan.

It also reflects their assessment of the futility of opposing it, leaving the option of trying to ensure to the extent possible that the plan be implemented in keeping with the basic principles of the peace process, within the framework of the road map. The statement was read by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Other senior Quartet representatives attending were Irish FM Brian Cowen, EU foreign policy director Javier Solana, and EU External Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten for the EU; FM Sergei Lavrov for Russia; and Secretary of State Colin Powell for the United States. The text was taken from the UN Web site at domino.un.org.

The Quartet reaffirms its commitment to our common vision of two states, Israel and a viable, democratic, sovereign, and contiguous Palestine, living side by side in peace and security; and calls on both parties to take steps to fulfill their obligations under the road map as called for in UN Security Council resolution 1515 and previous Quartet statements, and to meet the commitments they made at the Red Sea Summits in Aqaba and Sharm al-Shaykh. In that context, the Quartet urges the Government of Israel to implement its recent affirmation of its readiness to implement certain obligations under the road map, including dismantling of outposts erected since March 2001 and progress toward a freeze on settlement activity, and urges the Israeli government to implement these commitments and to fully meet its road map obligations.

The Quartet members reviewed developments since their last meeting in New York on 26 September 2003 and view with great concern the situation in the Middle East. The Quartet condemns the continuing terror attacks on Israel, and calls on the Palestinian Authority to take immediate action against terrorist groups and individuals who plan and execute such attacks. The Quartet members recognize Israel's legitimate right to self-defense in the face of terrorist attacks against its citizens, within the parameters of international humanitarian law, and the Quartet calls on the Government of Israel to exert maximum efforts to avoid civilian casualties. They also call on the Government of Israel to take all possible steps now, consistent with Israel's legitimate security needs, to ease the humanitarian and economic plight of the Palestinian people, including increasing freedom of movement for people and goods both within and from the West Bank and Gaza, removing checkpoints, and other steps to respect the dignity of the Palestinian people and improve their quality of life. Under the road map, the Government of Israel should take no actions undermining trust, including deportations; attacks on civilians; confiscation and/or demolition of Palestinian homes and property, as a punitive measure or to facilitate Israeli construction; destruction of Palestinian institutions and infrastructure; and other measures specified in the Tenet work plan. The Quartet calls for renewed efforts to reach a comprehensive cease-fire as a step toward dismantlement of terrorist capabilities and infrastructure, and renewed progress toward peace through the implementation of the road map.

The Quartet notes the Government of Israel's pledge that the barrier being erected by Israel should be a security rather than political barrier, and should be temporary rather than permanent. The Quartet continues to note with great concern the actual and proposed route of the barrier, particularly as it results in the confiscation of Palestinian land, cuts off the movement of people and goods, and undermines Palestinians' trust in the road map process as it appears to prejudice final borders of a future Palestinian state.

The Quartet took positive note of the announced intention of Israeli prime minister Sharon to withdraw from all Gaza settlements and parts of the West Bank. The Quartet welcomes and encourages such a step, which should provide a rare moment of opportunity in the search for peace in the Middle East. This initiative, which must bring about a full Israeli withdrawal and complete end of occupation in Gaza, can be a step toward achieving the two-state vision; and has the possibility of restarting progress on the road map. The Quartet further notes that any unilateral initiatives by the Government of Israel should be undertaken in a manner consistent with the road map and the two-state vision that underlies the road map.

The Quartet reaffirms President Bush's 24 June 2002 call for an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 through a settlement negotiated between the parties. The Quartet also notes that no party should take unilateral actions that seek to predetermine issues that can only be resolved through negotiation and agreement between the two parties. Any final settlement on issues such as borders and refugees must be mutually agreed to by Israelis and Palestinians based on Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397, 1515, the terms of reference of the Madrid peace process, the principle of land for peace, previous agreements, and the initiative of Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah endorsed by the Beirut Arab League Summit; and be consistent with the road map.

The Quartet and the international community are prepared to intensify their engagement with the Palestinians to restore momentum on the road map, enhance Palestinian humanitarian and economic conditions, build transparent and accountable Palestinian institutions, ensure security and stability in Gaza and the West Bank from which Israel withdraws, prevent all acts of terrorism, and ensure the dismantlement of armed terrorist groups. In furtherance of these goals, the Quartet will undertake the following steps, with appropriate mechanisms established to monitor progress and performance by all sides:

- The Quartet will act on an urgent basis, in conjunction with the World Bank, UNSCO [UN Special Coordinator's Office], and the AHLC [donors' Ad Hoc Liaison Committee], on the basis of a World Bank/UNSCO rapid-assessment study, to ensure Palestinian humanitarian needs are met, Palestinian infrastructure is restored and developed, and economic activity is reinvigorated. The Quartet welcomes the World Bank-established Trust Fund as an accountable, transparent, and appropriately benchmarked mechanism for receipt of international assistance.
- The Quartet is prepared to engage with a responsible and accountable Palestinian leadership, committed to reform and security performance. The Quartet, through an empowered prime minister and cabinet, the Task Force on Palestinian Reform, and in connection with the major donors working through the AHLC and LACC [donors' Local Aid Coordination Committee], will engage the Palestinians to reinvigorate the reform agenda of the road map, including a well-prepared and appropriately timed electoral process, paying particular attention to areas from which Israel has withdrawn. In this regard, the Quartet members will undertake to oversee and monitor progress on these fronts.

- The Quartet will seek to ensure that arrangements are put in place to ensure security for Palestinians and Israelis as well as freedom of movement and greater mobility and access for Palestinians. The Quartet underscores the need for agreed, transparent arrangements with all sides on access, mobility, and safety for international organizations and bilateral donors and their personnel. As Israel withdraws, custody of Israeli-built infrastructure and land evacuated by Israel should transfer through an appropriate mechanism to a reorganized Palestinian Authority in coordination with representatives of Palestinian civil society, the Quartet, and other representatives of the international community to determine equitable and transparent arrangements for the ultimate disposition of these areas as quickly as possible.
- Effective security arrangements continue to be critical to any possibility of progress. In coordination with, and under the auspices of, an oversight committee led by the United States, and in coordination with the empowered prime minister and cabinet, Palestinian security services should be restructured and retrained, consistent with the road map, to provide law and order and security to the Palestinians, to end terror attacks against Israel and Israelis, and to dismantle terrorist capabilities and infrastructure. The Quartet welcomes in particular the Government of Egypt's engagement on security issues, including efforts to achieve a comprehensive and lasting cease-fire as a step toward this goal.

The Quartet reaffirms its commitment to a just, comprehensive, and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict based upon Resolutions 242 and 338; and reminds all parties of the need to take into account long-term consequences of their actions and of the obligation for all parties to make rapid progress toward resumption of a political dialogue. The Quartet will remain engaged with Israelis, Palestinians, and all other parties—including through presence of its envoys on the ground—to ensure appropriate follow-up to the steps outlined above. An appropriate coordinating and oversight mechanism under the aegis of the Quartet will be established. The Quartet also calls on all states in the region to exert every effort to promote peace and to combat terrorism, and to prevent terrorist groups from making use of their territory to plan, prepare, or launch terrorist attacks.

H. U.S. PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH, LETTER TO KING ABDALLAH OF JORDAN ON FINAL STATUS ISSUES, WASHINGTON, 6 MAY 2004 (EXCERPTS).

On 19 April, King Abdallah canceled a planned meeting in Washington with President Bush set for 21 April in protest over Bush's endorsement of the Sharon plan, later stating that he would not reschedule the visit without a letter containing U.S. guarantees that disengagement would not prejudice final status, that refugees would be compensated if not allowed to return, and that Palestinians would be compensated for any occupied territory Israel retained under final status. Under pressure from the Quartet, President Bush handed a short letter to the king when he

arrived for the rescheduled meeting on 6 May. Besides the paragraphs on the peace process reproduced below, the letter also addressed aid to Jordan, Iraqi sovereignty, and democratic reforms in the Middle East. The full text is available on the Embassy of Jordan Web site at www.jordanembassyus.org.

During our visit, I was pleased to be able to discuss the ongoing quest for a just and durable peace in the Middle East. I commend your efforts in the pursuit of peace and justice in the Palestinian-Israeli dispute. I remain committed as ever to my 24 June 2002 vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, and to the establishment of a Palestinian state that is viable, contiguous, sovereign, and independent. I support the plan announced by Prime Minister Sharon to withdraw settlements from Gaza and parts of the West Bank. This bold plan can make a real contribution toward peace. The United States will not prejudice the outcome of final status negotiations, and all final status issues must still emerge from negotiations between the parties in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. The road map—the only plan endorsed by the United Nations, the European Union, Russia, the United States, and so many countries around the world as well as by Israel and the Palestinians—represents the best pathway toward realizing that vision, and I am committed to making it a reality.

You have been a strong supporter of the peace process and efforts to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli dispute in a just and fair manner. The United States intends to continue to work closely with you to help achieve that goal, and to assist you in your historic efforts to lead Jordan toward greater peace, freedom, and prosperity.

Your Majesty, I understand that your country and your people have important interests at stake in any settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. And I know that your country has important interests in the emergence of a new Iraq. I assure you that my government views Jordan's security, prosperity, and territorial integrity as vital, and we will oppose any developments in the region that might endanger your interests.

I. UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, RESOLUTION 58/292 REAFFIRMING THE PALESTINIAN RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION, NEW YORK, 6 MAY 2004.

The resolution, put forward by Malaysia in response to Bush's endorsement of the Sharon plan, was passed by a vote of 140 in favor (including all the EU countries) and 6 against (Israel, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, and the United States), with 11 abstentions (Australia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru, Serbia and Montenegro, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Tuvalu). The text was taken from the UN Web site at domino.un.org.

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolutions 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974, 43/177 of 15 December 1988 and 52/250 of 7 July 1998,

Recalling also Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967, 338 (1973) of 22 October 1973, 1397 (2002) of 12 March 2002, and 1515 (2003) of 19 November 2003,

Recalling further the relevant provisions of international law as well as relevant United Nations resolutions with regard to Israeli settlements and to occupied East Jerusalem,

Reaffirming the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force,

Noting that Palestine, in its capacity as observer and pending its attainment of full membership in the United Nations, does not present credentials to the General Assembly,

Affirming the need to enable the Palestinian people to exercise sovereignty and to achieve independence in their state, Palestine,

1. *Affirms* that the status of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, remains one of military occupation, and affirms, in accordance with the rules and principles of international law and relevant resolutions of the United Nations, including Security Council resolutions, that the Palestinian people have the right to self-determination and to sovereignty over their territory and that Israel, the occupying power, has only the duties and obligations of an occupying power under the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Regulations annexed to the Hague Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War of 1907;

2. *Expresses its determination* to contribute to the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the attainment of a just and comprehensive negotiated peace settlement in the Middle East resulting in two viable, sovereign and independent states, Israel and Palestine, based on the pre-1967 borders and living side by side in peace and security.

J. U.S. PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH, LETTER TO PALESTINIAN PRIME MINISTER AHMAD QURAI' ON THE SHARON DISENGAGEMENT PLAN, WASHINGTON, 11 MAY 2004.

President Bush's letter was in response to a letter from PM Qurai' (which has not been released) that apparently expressed concerns regarding the Sharon plan, requested clarifications regarding U.S. policy toward final status, and offered (as Qurai' stated publicly on 5 May) to resume final status negotiations with Israel immediately. Of note: Bush's letter was sent on the letterhead of the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem and did not contain an official signature, further underlining the White House policy (in place since the Karine A affair in January 2002) of refusing to deal directly with the PA to the extent possible as long as Yasir Arafat retains actual authority. The text was received from the PLO Negotiations Support Department.

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

Thank you for your letter, written just after my meeting with Prime Minister Sharon. I appreciate receiving your thoughts on these issues of vital concern to [the] Palestinian people, and have delayed replying until after the Quartet meeting and the visit here of King Abdallah of Jordan.

In my remarks on 14 April, I reiterated my, and America's continuing commitment to the vision I announced on 24 June 2002, of two independent states—Israel and

Palestine—living side by side in peace and security, and to the road map as the route to get there.

As you know, in the years since the 1967 war, Israel has not withdrawn any settlements from territory that will become part of the Palestinian state. Under Prime Minister Sharon's proposal, the government of Israel would withdraw all settlements in Gaza, and several more in the West Bank—the latter a powerful precedent for further West Bank withdrawals. This would be a good step toward preparing for peace and it is in this context that I welcomed Prime Minister Sharon's decision. You will also have seen the Quartet statement of 4 May also endorsing the Prime Minister's initiative: "The Quartet took positive note of the announced intention of Israeli prime minister Sharon to withdraw from all Gaza settlements and parts of the West Bank. The Quartet welcomes and encourages such a step, which should provide a rare moment of opportunity in the search for peace in the Middle East."

If the plan is implemented, there is a real chance to move forward towards peace and towards the realization of Palestinian national aspirations. The building of the institutions of a Palestinian state could then begin, in earnest, in Gaza. I urge you and your cabinet to seize the moment and undertake practical, positive steps that will meet your road map commitments, will make an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank a turning point in this long and tragic conflict, and will truly improve the lives of Palestinians living there.

The United States will join with others in the international community to foster the development of democratic Palestinian political institutions and new leadership committed to those institutions, the reconstruction of civil institutions, the growth of a free and prosperous economy, and the building of capable security institutions dedicated to maintaining law and order and dismantling terrorist organizations. At the Quartet principals meeting on 4 May, we discussed with the other members of the Quartet how to better organize and intensify our collective efforts with Palestinians and Israelis to take full advantage of opportunities before us in the coming months.

I stated on 14 April 2004, that the United States will not prejudice the outcome of final status negotiations, including on the borders of a Palestinian state, and I emphasized that all final status issues must still be negotiated between the parties to reach mutually agreed results. This was a matter I discussed in my speech on 24 June 2002 as well, where I said that ultimately, Israelis and Palestinians must address the core issues that divide them if there is to be a real peace, resolving all claims and ending the conflict between them. This means that the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 will be ended through a settlement negotiated between the parties, based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338.

Those negotiations, I believe, must reflect certain realities about the lives of Palestinians and Israelis, the future Palestinian state, and the security of Israel as a Jewish state. There must be an agreed, just, fair, and realistic framework for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue.

I look forward to the day when final status discussions can begin, so the Israel[i] occupation can be ended and a free and independent and peaceful Palestinian state can emerge.

Your letter mentions possible "fast track negotiations on permanent status starting where we left in the Taba 2001" talks. I believe there are no shortcuts to peace,

particularly in light of more than three years of terrorism in the region. This is why the United States is committed to the road map, which is a performancebased plan. Just as Israel must meet its road map commitments, I urge you to undertake the road map commitments made by the Palestinian Authority, which in Phase I include “calling for an immediate and unconditional cease-fire to end armed activity and all acts of violence against Israelis anywhere,” “comprehensive political reform,” “sustained, targeted, and effective operations” against terrorism, and “dismantlement of terrorist capabilities and infrastructure.”

The road ahead will be difficult, but progress is possible. I am glad you will be meeting with Dr. Rice on 17 May, so that she can answer any questions you may have about U.S. policy and can hear fully your views about how to move forward. The United States looks forward to working with Palestinians, Israelis, peaceseeeking Arab states, and with the other members of the Quartet to advance along the road map toward a just and lasting peace.



Palestinians inspect the rubble of their homes in Rafah after they were demolished by the IDF, 15 May. (Ibraheem Abu Mustafa/Reuters)