

The Disengaged: Gaza And The Fragmentation Of Palestinian Nationhood

I. Introduction

Shortly before midnight on July 22nd, 2002 I heard an unusually loud roar from an aircraft flying low above the skies of Gaza City. Because the sound of Israeli warplanes is commonplace in the area, I didn't feel particularly alarmed and went to sleep as usual. I was awakened less than a half hour later by a call on my cell phone: An F-16 fighter jet had just dropped a one-ton bomb on an apartment building in one of Gaza City's poorest and most crowded neighborhoods, about 15 minutes from where I lived.

Ambulances, fire fighters and the press were already on the scene. Salah Shehadeh, leader of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, was dead. So were 14 others, we learned later on, most of them women and children. Later that morning, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon would proclaim this event "one of [Israel's] greatest successes." I wandered through the wreckage of the bombing the following afternoon, practically numb to what I was seeing, what struck me most was that I could have been almost anywhere in the Occupied Territories: Jenin, Ramallah, Khan Yunis, Rafah... The familiarity of the destruction was, for me, the most disturbing thing because it had begun to symbolize the success of a much greater goal: the fragmentation of Palestinian nationhood into ruined, localized identities. As the popularity of Hamas continues to rise and the media blindly herald the coming "disengagement" from Gaza, I remember the freshly painted graffiti on a wall near the site of the blasted away building that hot July day. "This is the Israeli Peace," it declared.

The head of the Israeli Air Force, the man who ordered the bombing, was Major General Dan Halutz. In an interview nearly a month later, when asked about charges that he was a war criminal who should be tried at The Hague, Halutz commented, "[W]e operate according to an extremely high moral code. And since that is what guides us, I don't think that there is any court to which we have to give an accounting... Personally, I have a deep feeling of justice and morality. And as for how I feel - I feel just fine, thank you. I really meant it when I told the pilots that I sleep very well."

Pressed to comment on the fact that so many innocent civilians died in the bombing, Halutz remarked that he was "sorry" that "uninvolved civilians were hurt" but added "I deliberately say 'uninvolved civilians' because we know for a fact that even the greatest terrorists are sometimes cloaked in a civilian guise." With such equivocation, he rationalized the indiscriminate killing of Palestinians.

Halutz was later promoted to Deputy Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and this February, with Sharon's crucial support, was appointed Chief of the IDF General Staff. He will replace outgoing Chief Moshe Ya'alon this summer -just in time to oversee the implementation of the Gaza "Disengagement Plan." His appointment will ensure that no dissent arises from among the tightly knit circle of leaders closest to Ariel Sharon at a crucial moment in the history of Israel's occupation.

Halutz's appointment dispels the image of benevolence and restraint so often accorded the IDF. As Haaretz reporter Gideon Levy has written, "The time has come to shake off the weeping shooters, who enact a cruel policy and enjoy a humanitarian image. Halutz will shoot and he won't weep." His appointment should also help dispel the notion, advanced so confidently throughout the US media, that the "Disengagement Plan" is a "giant step" toward peace in the Middle East, and that it is "Israel's bold initiative to bring security and peace to its people."

In a recent editorial typical of the commentary on events in Israel/Palestine, The New York Times counseled us that "it would be churlish to greet [Sharon's] historic decision with anything other than enthusiasm. The prime minister has risked enormous political capital in boldly going where his predecessors feared to tread: agreeing to evacuate settlements without first wringing something out of the Palestinians." On this latter point the New York Times' editors agree with Sharon's chief rival, Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who condemns "disengagement" on the grounds that it exacts no concessions from the Palestinians.

Most of the "pro-Israel" camp in the US is agreed that Israel has taken a significant step towards peace by unilaterally relinquishing Gaza, a step that apparently justifies the Bush-Sharon agreement of April 2004 effectively allowing Israel to annex its largest West Bank settlements, referred to as "major Israeli population centers". One listens in vain for voices

objecting to another move by Israel to secure land for itself and continue the process of wrecking Palestine. With its whole-hearted backing of “disengagement” and its approval of the “separation barrier,” the US continues to legitimize and make possible Israel’s actions: the seizure of about 8-10% of the West Bank, the division of its key remaining areas into northern and southern zones, the complete isolation of Palestinian East Jerusalem, and the process of national devolution that all of these actions accelerate. The crucial fact that geographic “Palestine” now comprises non-contiguous chunks of land drained of their resources in less than 20% of historical Palestine fades into the background behind the heroic rhetoric of the coming “disengagement.” Media and policy makers have focused our attention not on the misery to which Palestinian Gaza has for many years been subjected, but rather on how “emotionally gut-wrenching” the evacuation of illegal Jewish settlers from Gaza is going to be for Israeli Jewish society, especially the settlers; on how removing the 21 illegal settlements that have stolen over one third of Gaza’s tiny land mass away from its 1.4 million Palestinian residents is “shaping up as a traumatic social episode in Israel’s history.”

II. Razing the Gaza Strip

Despite the condescension and jubilation with which “disengagement” has been greeted here in the United States, life in the Gaza Strip after “disengagement” will continue to worsen in significant ways. First, according to International Law, specifically the 1907 Hague Regulations, Gaza will still be occupied territory despite claims to the contrary in the Disengagement document. As long as Israel retains control of the Philadelphi corridor (the Gaza/Egypt border) and all air space and territorial waters, as is stipulated in the revised Plan, it will have full control over the movement of all people and goods into and out of the Gaza Strip. Israel will also retain the right to intervene militarily in Gaza any time it wishes. Under these conditions, Gaza will continue to exist as the world’s largest open-range prison, with its economy almost entirely dependent on Israel.

Additionally, as stated in the “Disengagement Plan,” Israel expects itself to be absolved of all responsibility toward the nearly 1.4 million Palestinians once the Jewish settlers have been evacuated and the IDF re-deployed. This includes absolution from extending humanitarian aid should there continue to be chaotic or inadequate internal political rule; should there be a complete breakdown of internal security; should Gaza’s already sub-standard medical system collapse; should its education system falter under its increasingly overcrowded and under-funded schools; should poverty and unemployment continue to rise; and should third party aid organizations be refused entry into Gaza via Israel (as will be Israel’s right to determine).

In other words, having instigated a process of social and economic misery, and having deliberately encouraged the rise of political chaos, especially during the last four and a half years, Israel will nonetheless argue that it has no obligations to help repair the damage. As conditions worsen, Israel and other enlightened first-world nations will be able instead to point to the implosion of social ills in Gaza as further evidence of Arab backwardness and barbarism. Meanwhile, owing primarily to the wretched conditions in Gaza, Islamist groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad will continue to gain in popularity, giving Israel more excuses to act unilaterally whenever it wishes.

Indeed, Sharon would never have produced his “Disengagement Plan” had Israel not adequately wrecked the economic, social and political infrastructures of the Gaza Strip during (and before) the second Intifada. The devastation Israeli policies have wrought upon Gaza allow it to be abandoned as part of a deliberate policy of Palestinian national fragmentation. A look at the facts undermines the claim that “disengagement” from Gaza has exacted no price from the Palestinians. In the meantime, while the estimated costs of “reconstructing” Gaza are astronomical, Israel expects to owe nothing.

III. Assessing the Damage

There is a notable increase in the application of certain illegal policies in the Gaza Strip during the uprising, with statistics for the years 2002 & 2003 roughly equivalent. The Israeli military pursued these same policies in the West Bank, but their frequency tended to decline after “Operation Defensive Shield” in the spring of 2002. This was a result of the effective “decapitation” of West Bank resistance. Despite the assassinations of Hamas leaders such as Sheikh Ahmad Yassin and Abdel Aziz Rantisi in Gaza in the spring of 2004, resistance in the Gaza Strip has been and will be much more difficult to crush. When Palestinian President Yasser Arafat died on November 11th 2004, Israel lost its most important pretext for continuing these policies with unabated intensity in Gaza. The election of Mahmoud Abbas to the presidency of

the PA in January 2005 further threatened the legitimacy of Israeli unilateralism. At present, it appears that the Sharon government is seeking ways to undermine the authority of Abbas, such as by insisting to US President George Bush that he is not doing enough to "fight terror" so that it can regain the advantage of having "no partner for peace." If Sharon succeeds, we can expect the resumption of Israeli violence in the Occupied Territories, particularly in Gaza where the resistance is stronger. For now it suffices to look at the record over the past four and a half years.

According to B`Tselem, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, Israeli forces killed 112 Palestinians in 2000 in Gaza, 177 in 2001, 370 in 2002, 369 in 2003 and 614 in 2004. Similar numbers can be found by researching Palestinian human rights NGOs. For example, according to the Mezan Center for Human Rights in Gaza City, Israeli forces killed 123 Palestinians after the start of the al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000. In 2001, the number increased to 243. In 2002 and 2003 respectively, the numbers were 471 and 397, while in 2004 the number reached 730. Though the West Bank has almost twice the population of the Gaza Strip, nearly 50% of all Palestinian deaths since September 2000 have occurred in Gaza, most of them over the past two and a half years.

Killing targeted leaders of different resistance organizations also intensified. B`Tselem records 2 extra-judicial assassinations in Gaza in Sept. 2000, 3 in 2001, 14 in 2002, 38 in 2003 and 45 in 2004. The Palestine Human Rights Monitoring group records 2 in 2002, 2 in 2001, 6 in 2002, 23 in 2003 and 26 in 2004.

Home demolitions have increased as well. For example, the Israeli military ordered 693 homes demolished in the Gaza Strip between October 2000 and December 2002 leaving 5,655 persons homeless. In 2003, Israel ordered the demolition of 855 homes in the Gaza Strip leaving 8,318 persons homeless. By 2004 the number of homes demolished by September had already reached 1,093 with 10,574 people rendered homeless. Between September and December 2004 another 1,991 homes were destroyed bringing the year`s total to 3,084. (These figures pertain to the number of homes completely demolished or damaged beyond repair; they do not take into account the number of partially damaged homes.) The vast majority of homes demolished for "security" purposes were in the Gaza seaside border town of Rafah as a result of Israel`s "buffer zone" expansion along the Philadelphi corridor, the Egypt/Gaza border. The planned demolition of between 200 and 3000 more homes along this corridor has currently been put on hold as new security arrangements are negotiated with the Egyptians. However, by the end of 2004, a total of 28,483 people had been made homeless in the Gaza Strip with another 28, 222 people in need of home repairs as a result of military incursions.

While much was made in the press -both here and in Israel— of Israel`s decision, announced by Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz in mid-February 2005, to ban the practice of home demolitions for "punitive" purposes, it was "military necessity" that served as the pretext for almost all of the home destruction in Gaza, meaning that their demolition is still considered legal. That the demolition of homes in Gaza persisted throughout 2004, well after the Israeli government announced its plans to "disengage," should have raised questions in the minds of international observers. Some argue that this was the result of a campaign to destroy the smuggling tunnels along the Gaza/Egypt border, but the relatively few weapons and weapons` materials (with extremely limited capacity or potential) that make it through these tunnels highlights the weakness of this argument, as does the fact that the Israelis, the Egyptians and the PA have all cooperated to close the tunnels down. Additionally, a great deal of the destruction occurred in the northern Gaza Strip, further weakening this argument. Finally, it should also be recalled that in four and a half years of uprising only one of the suicide bombings in Israel originated from within the Gaza Strip because its borders have been so impenetrable.

Other violations of the Geneva Conventions committed by the Israeli military also steadily increased in the Gaza Strip over the four and a half years of uprising, especially after "disengagement" was proclaimed. These have rarely been mentioned in the US media and include damage to the agricultural sector (bulldozed, burned, uprooted and otherwise destroyed land and crops); destruction of agricultural and municipal water wells; damage to industrial establishments; damage to commercial and public facilities; damage to the environment and damage to motor vehicles. More specifically, such activities have involved the wholesale destruction of roads (ripping the concrete up with a steel blade), water and sewage pipes, the severing of electrical wires, the bombing of hospitals, clinics, mosques and schools, the wrecking of playgrounds, recreational spaces and a zoo, the destruction of private businesses such as restaurants, shops, greenhouses, livestock farms and marketplaces, the crushing of cars, trucks, buses and ambulances, and the polluting of drinking water supplies.

In addition, the complete closure (internal checkpoints and external crossings) of the Gaza Strip has increased from year to year as well, more than doubling between 2003 and 2004. In 2004 the main "Erez" crossing into Gaza from Israel was completely shut down for 325 days and the Erez industrial zone was off limits for 180 days. The Rafah crossing, the only crossing through which Gazans are allowed to leave for other countries, was closed for 84 days and off limits, even on "open" days, to Palestinian males between the ages of 16 and 35. Palestinians passing through these terminals are routinely subjected to invasive searches, intimidation and humiliation. It is difficult to make people unfamiliar with these practices aware of the level of hardship internal and external closures create for individuals, businesses and organizations on a day-to-day and hour-to-hour basis. There are numerous accounts, for example, of how women have been forced to give birth at checkpoints, how patients requiring urgent care are unable to get to hospitals, how students (primarily women) have been forced to end their university studies because they cannot count on getting back and forth to their homes, how family members have been prevented from visiting relatives and friends, even attending their funerals. The stories are endless. As with the other statistics, the numbers provide but a bare outline to a highly effective system of dehumanization.

It must again be emphasized that although the Disengagement Plan was made public in early 2004, the months that followed it - through the end of December 2004—proved to be the most destructive of the entire Intifada in terms of killings, assassinations, incursions, closures, house demolitions, and other offenses. Any casual observer has to wonder therefore what the real motivations behind the Disengagement Plan are.

IV. Prospects for Recovery

A broader look at socio-economic factors resulting from Israeli occupation policies in Gaza offers a more general look at the price Gazans have paid -and will continue to pay—for "disengagement." At the end of 2004, the official (probably conservative) unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip stood at 35%, with poverty at 65%. In Gaza alone, 8,000 jobs were lost in 2004. Between 1999 and 2004, the unemployment rate rose in Gaza by 18% while poverty increased 33%. According to the World Bank, this trend will continue under the current "Disengagement Plan" with the projected poverty and unemployment rates reaching 76% and 49% respectively by 2008. Even with some positive modifications to the current plan (what the World Bank labels "Disengagement Plus") those rates would be expected to increase to 70% and 44% respectively by 2008.

In an article published in the Israeli daily Haaretz on 8 March 2005, IDF chief Moshe Ya'alon is quoted as saying, "Our goal is to stop any kind of Palestinian working in Israel by 2008," a goal that had already been suggested in the "Disengagement Plan." According to a recent World Bank report on the fate of Gaza's economy after "disengagement",

[The Government of Israel] is proposing to implement some important measures... These positive measures would be undercut, however, by several key constraining factors - maintenance of the back-to-back cargo handling system, continued internal closure in the central and southern West Bank, completion of the Separation Barrier, continued poor access between Gaza and the West Bank, the termination of work permits by end-2008 and the abrogation of the quasi-Customs Union in Gaza. The collective weight of these factors would overwhelm other positive developments...

Israel is urged to re-examine the concept of "economic separation." If labor permits are no longer issued from 2008 and if the quasi-Customs Union in Gaza is abrogated once Israel withdraws from Philadelphi, Palestinian economic recovery may stop dead in its tracks.

Indeed, the Israeli human rights organization B'tselem documents the on-going abuse of human rights in Gaza even after the February 8th Sharm el Sheikh summit that was supposed to herald an overall loosening of restrictions on all of the Occupied Territories. By continuing to restrict the movement of all goods and people to and from the Gaza Strip, B'tselem demonstrates the on-going economic strangulation of Gaza and "warns against Israel's attempt to disavow its responsibility for the residents of the Gaza Strip following disengagement."

In late fall of 2004 there were rumors floating around some of the NGOs in the Gaza Strip that Israel hoped to get the EU and the US to concede that Gaza is "no longer occupied" once its troops have been redeployed and the 8,000 settlers evacuated. This would be legally impossible, however, under the terms of the current "Disengagement Plan." For either the EU or

the US to make this concession without some adjustments to the Plan could damage their standing in the international community. As a result, a number of possible scenarios were considered that would allow a loose definition of "no longer occupied" to apply, including the full evacuation of Israeli troops along the Philadelphi route, the relinquishing of Israeli control over Gaza's air- and seaports, or both.

Significantly, on March 11th, 2005 Israel announced its intention to withdraw completely from the Philadelphi corridor after disengagement, giving full control of the area to Egypt, a measure that modifies the current "Disengagement Plan" document. Under the current agreement, 750 Egyptian border police are due to be deployed along the corridor in May or June 2005. Israel will ostensibly leave the area after disengagement, possibly in 2006, if they deem the Egyptian efforts at stopping cross-border smuggling sufficient.

Egypt has already agreed in principle to help train PA security forces and to deploy its own forces within the Strip in addition to taking over control of the border area. For those casually observing the situation here in the US this might seem a desirable option. For Gazans, well acquainted with official Egyptian treatment of Palestinians -second only to Lebanese in brutality among the Arab states— and the fact that Egypt would be acting in this role only as a surrogate for Israel, this is a dreaded scenario.

What is clear is that, with Palestinians no longer eligible for employment inside Israel, a more porous border with Egypt could mean the exit of thousands of people to look for sustainable work elsewhere. The Egyptian economy would scarcely be able to accommodate these people, and the Egyptian government would likely initiate restrictions preferring Egyptian workers to their Palestinian counterparts, causing them to have to look farther away for feasible options. Families would be split up for months or years at a time, or would leave Gaza altogether. The choice between leaving Gaza and staying when conditions are steadily worsening leaves the average person little time for the work of nation building. This situation resembles the one at present, except that, as figures presented here suggest, it is likely to deteriorate further as Israel persists in its policies of economic separation, in particular the abrogation of the quasi-Customs Union with Gaza, the near complete prohibition on contact (business or otherwise) between Gazans and West Bankers, and the gradual disappearance of all employment possibilities within Israel.

The process of "disengagement" will thus have hastened the process of Palestinian national dismemberment. Regional and communal identities are already reasserting themselves over a more singular, unified Palestinian national identity. The Gaza Strip will join the Diaspora community as "disengagement" causes it to resemble a massive refugee camp similar to those in Lebanon far more than the southwestern corner of a vibrant or developing nation. Despite major changes from within the leadership of the PA and the PLO that might otherwise provide the governing foundation of a viable Palestinian state, Sharon's "Disengagement Plan" sets the stage for continued movement in the opposite direction - towards greater national fragmentation and the reassertion of particularism and local identities. A similar process is already discernible in what is left of the West Bank.

V. The Disengaged

It is incumbent upon us to ask ourselves what possible benefits Israel derives for itself by continuing to squeeze the Gaza Strip even after "disengagement." What does it gain by promoting policies that would make the establishment of a viable Palestinian state impossible? What does this say about its ultimate aims, and about the so-called "peace process"? How will the appointment of former World Bank chief James Wolfensohn as the new US "special envoy for disengagement" improve the situation in Gaza without a corresponding change in US policy toward Israel and sweeping Israeli policy changes toward Gaza? What conditions will the United States slap on the Palestinian Authority for the price of Gaza's "reconstruction", which it has announced it will manage after the pullout?

"Disengagement" is the culmination of policies designed to ruin an entire society and to fragment and emasculate Palestinian identity, though we have spoken here primarily of material and "geographic" damage. One has only to walk the streets of Rafah or Khan Yunis to imagine the invisible scars occupation policies have left on the people of Gaza, especially its children. The houses still standing near the IDF and settlement zones gape at you with blasted open walls, hundreds of bullet holes along their facades, cardboarded-up windows, and flimsy makeshift repairs. Laundry hangs limply out to dry facing the IDF sniper towers in the distance as if its owners have resigned themselves to their desperate vulnerability. Dust and heat blow

relentlessly off the desert; breezes off the sea cause a stifling, humid haze to settle around the deteriorating cities.

Fifty-five percent of children in Gaza's war zones suffer from acute post-traumatic stress disorder whose symptoms include bed-wetting, nightmares, aggressiveness, emotional numbness, the inability to concentrate or learn, panic attacks, crying spells and deep depression. Some children speak about wanting death because life offers them nothing. Their behavior indicates an abnormal fearlessness towards danger and a despair that is incongruent with their young age. The layers of present-day civil society cultivated by the NGOs, the elites, the commercial and business classes, those educated at home and abroad and receptive to innovation and change are being stripped away allowing an older but rawer traditional and tribal society to reassert itself in ways that detract severely from the processes of building a modern state and of forging a unified and progressive national identity. But these and other costs have somehow been left out of the equation when gauging what the Palestinians have given in return for the generosity Israel is showing by getting off their land.

By late July 2005, or when the evacuation of Jewish settlers begins, the Gaza Strip's three main sections will be locked down and the IDF will have carved a second series of roads into the land running parallel to the existing Jewish-only roads to facilitate the evacuation. Israeli authorities will have restricted journalists' access to all involved parties "embedding" them with the evacuation troops and concentrating the world's attention on the fate of the settlers and of Israel's torment in ousting them. But the Gazans will again suffer the greatest hardships as IDF policies grind all daily movement within the Strip to a halt.

There are some who believe that "disengagement" will never happen, some who support it as a step toward reconciliation, and some who oppose it for ideological reasons. Few oppose it on the moral grounds that it is an instrument of national disintegration and territorial aggrandizement marketed as a peace initiative. Few understand that hostilities will subside as a result of its implementation. All of us should support the evacuation of the settlements from Gaza and the withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces from the Strip on the grounds that international law demands them. But equally, we should oppose Sharon's Disengagement Plan for the cynical motivations that inspired it and the reality its execution is going to create. The only hope is that out of this dismal reality a more unified and effective resistance movement will develop, one that can transcend the particularities created by this disaster and whose purveyors can bring to it the global call for universal human rights and an end to all occupations.

***** **NOTES and References:** *****

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"The high and the mighty," by Vered Levy-Barzilai. Haaretz, 21 Aug. 2002.

Ibid; Haaretz

"He'll shoot and he won't weep," by Gideon Levy. Haaretz, 28 Feb. 2005.

ADL head, Abraham Foxman quoted in "ADL poll: 67% of Americans back unilateral pullout plan," by Shlomo Shamir, Haaretz; 10 April 2005. The "Peace" group, Brit Tzedek v' Shalom has also sent around a fundraising letter in which it announces, "It seems there is finally a chance for peace in Israel," going on to describe the historic step of "disengagement" from Gaza. (April 2005 newsletter from Brit Tzedek.)

"Mr. Sharon's Giant Step," New York Times editorial, 24 February 2005.

"Netanyahu slams PM's pullout plan," by Haaretz staff. 30 March 2005. Netanyahu is quoted as saying, "We have the task of returning to the policies we left, the policies of asking for something in exchange for each of our concessions."

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"Jewish Settlers in Gaza Strip girding for pullout battle," by Baz Ratner, Associated Press, in the Wisconsin State Journal, 14 April 2005. See also "One Step Back in the Mideast," a New York Times editorial, 23 March 2005.

According to the 1907 Hague Regulations "Territory is occupied when it has actually been placed under the authority of the hostile army. The occupation only extends to the territory where such authority has been established and can be exercised" -In " Issues Arising from Implementation of Disengagement and the End of Israeli Occupation in the Gaza Strip," by Geoffrey Aronson, 15 January 2005, a paper prepared for Canada's International Development Research Center.

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www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace+Process/Reference+Documents/Revised+Disengagement+Plan+6-June-2004.htm?

A discussion of these and related matters can be found in Geoffrey Aronson's "Issues Arising from Implementation of Disengagement and the End of Israeli Occupation in the Gaza Strip," a paper prepared for Canada's International Development Research Center, 15 January 2005. See: www.fmep.org

For further reading on the destruction of Gazan (and general Palestinian) society, see e.g., writings by Baruch Kimmerling, Sara Roy, Amira Hass and Graham Usher among others. It should also be noted here that while Israel's refusal to admit humanitarian responsibility in Gaza after disengagement is morally reprehensible, it has long refused to admit or administer its humanitarian obligations under the 1949 Geneva Convention with respect to occupying powers.

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B'tselem -The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories: Casualties by Year in the Gaza Strip: Palestinians by Israeli Security Forces in the period 29/09/00 until 31/12/2004. www.btselem.org.

Al Mezan Center for Human Rights document: Human Losses - Number of Palestinians killed by IOF in the Gaza Strip since Sept. 2000. www.mezan.org. One can also compare the statistics collected by the Palestine Center for Human Rights in Gaza City and the Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics for similar findings, viz. that the number of deaths went up year by year with 2002 & 2003 roughly equivalent. See www.pchrgaza.org and www.pcbs.gov.ps.

Using statistics on overall deaths and the population of each territory from The Foundation for Middle East Peace (www.fmep.org) which go up until the end of Oct. 2004: 3,277 Palestinians killed overall with nearly 1550 of them in Gaza. The West Bank's population is estimated at 2.4 million and the Gaza Strip's at 1.4 million.

B'tselem - The Israel Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories: Assassinations by Year [in the Gaza Strip] In the period 29/09/2000 until 31/12/2004. www.btselem.org, and Palestine Human Rights Monitoring Group: List of Palestinians who were assassinated during the al-Aqsa Intifada [by city or region]: www.phrmg.org. Again, other Palestinian human rights NGOs list similar figures in their records.

United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA). Houses Demolished in Gaza by Month: Oct. 2000 - Sept. 2004 and the Statistical Report for Demolished Shelters for Refugees & Non-Refugees Since October 2000 up to 31 December 2004. www.unrwa.org

Amnesty International. "Israel Action: An end to `punitive` house demolitions." <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/action/israel/demolitions.shtml>

For an excellent and detailed report on the weapons` smuggling tunnels in Rafah see "Razing Rafah, Mass Home Demolitions in the Gaza Strip," prepared by Human Rights Watch, 2004. Journalist Amira Hass (Haaretz) has also written extensively on this subject, has seen the tunnels and discussed their capacity with IDF staff.

Indeed, some Israelis have pointed to the "success" of the physical encirclement of Gaza as a justification for the `separation barrier` in the West Bank. The suicide bombing in Ashdod involved 2-3 Gazans.

Statistics are from the Mezan Center for Human Rights, Gaza; www.mezan.org

Statistics are from both the Mezan Center for Human Rights and the Palestine Centre for Human Rights. www.mezan.org and www.pchrgaza.org (PCHR for number of total closure days of Erez, and Mezan for number of days when the Erez Industrial zone was off limits.)

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"Israel`s Peeping Tom in Rafah still operational," Report from the Palestine Centre for Human Rights, 7 April 2005. www.pchrgaza.org

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Ibid; pp. 25, 27.

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"Israel planning withdrawal from flashpoint buffer zone in Gaza," by Hazel Ward. Agence France-Presse (AFP). 11 March 2005.

"Israel planning withdrawal from flashpoint buffer zone in Gaza," by Hazel Ward. Agence France-Presse (AFP). 11 March 2005.

Amira Hass alluded to this process in a radio interview when asked by Democracy Now host Amy Goodman about the significance of Sharon`s settlement and “disengagement” plans. 12 April 2005.

“Rice: U.S. to Aid in Gaza Reconstruction,” by Barry Schweid, Associated Press. 6 April 2005. On 15 April 2005 the US State Department appointed Wolfensohn to his new role.

“Indifferent to death: tragedy of the traumatized children of the Intifada,” by Sandra Jordan; The Observer. 3 April 2005. Jordan quotes Dr. Fadel Abu Hein, associate professor of mental health and psychology at Al-Aqsa University, as saying “In the long term, the trauma will grow with the child and become part of the personality. The disease matures with him.”

“IDF will build new roads in Gaza to facilitate pullout,” by Amos Harel; Haaretz, 14 April 2005

“Israel to embed journalists during Gaza withdrawal; Hopes to depict government`s view of evacuation of Jewish communities,” by Aaron Klein; www.worldnetdaily.com/news posted 19 April 2005.

On 21 April 2005 a source in the [Israeli] Prime Minister`s office announced that “disengagement” would be postponed for three weeks in recognition of the Jewish holiday, Tisha B`av. Some will doubtless see this as a sign that “disengagement” will never take place. “Source: Disengagement will be postponed by three weeks,” by Amos Harel and Aluf Benn; Haaretz, 21 April 2005.