

## After Hebron

### Introduction

The withdrawal from Hebron, the transfer of civilian powers to the Palestinian Authority, and the redeployment of Israeli troops outside the city's Arab neighborhoods do not cover the totality of Israel's obligations regarding the redeployment of Israeli forces in the West Bank and Gaza, to be fulfilled within the framework of the Interim Agreement. The following stage, which involves three additional redeployments beyond the boundaries of the Palestinian Authority, constitutes a portion of the commitment made by Israel within the framework of the Interim Agreement of September 1995.

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### Background

The agreement signed between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization in September 1995 sets down a number of basic, crucial conditions influencing the continuation of the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians during the interim period, to be concluded not later than 4 May 1999:

**One.**The West Bank and Gaza Strip Territory — to be considered as a single territorial unit — except for issues that will be negotiated in the Final Status negotiations, will come under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority.

**Two.**The said issues, to be negotiated in the Final Status negotiations, consist of: the status of Jerusalem, the Palestine refugee issue, Israeli settlements, security arrangements, borders, relations and cooperation with neighboring countries, and other issues of common interest not specifically indicated but clearly to be included in the discussions (e.g., water, infrastructure, etc.).

**a.** The outcome of the Final Status negotiations should not be prejudiced or preempted by other agreements reached by both sides during the interim period.

### **The Initial Redeployment**

The first phase of the redeployment of Israeli forces outside the territory of the Palestinian Authority was carried out in accordance with the principles established for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip and Jericho, set down in the Declaration of Principles, as well as the detailed agreement signed between the two sides on 4 May 1994, in Cairo. According to this agreement, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) were to redeploy from the bulk of the territory comprising the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Tract. The suspended discussions on the extension of the boundaries of the latter region may still erupt into a disagreement between the two parties.

### **The Second Redeployment**

According to the Declaration of Principles and the Interim Agreement, it was determined that the first phase in this redeployment of Israeli forces would be completed 22 days before the date of the election of the Palestinian Council, which was conducted in January 1996. This phase was to include redeployment of Israeli military forces outside the areas populated by the Palestinians in the West Bank. These regions covered the cities, towns, villages, refugee camps, and hamlets. As agreed upon, the Palestinian police were deployed in the regions vacated by the IDF in coordination with Israeli authorities, and assumed responsibility for public order and internal security for the Palestinians. It was agreed that Israel would continue to be responsible for external security as well as the overall security of Israelis for the purpose of safeguarding their internal security and public order.

This stage of the redeployment was executed on schedule, except for the region surrounding the city of Hebron, which was postponed with the agreement of the two sides. According to the understanding reached, Israel was to vacate the city immediately following the Israeli elections, which took place at the end of May 1996, in accordance with the guidelines which had been determined in the Interim Agreement of September 1995.

The new Israeli government postponed the implementation of the redeployment in Hebron, which caused tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbors, including the Palestinians. Eventually, a new and more specific agreement was signed to facilitate this redeployment, which took place during mid-January 1997.

### **The Further Redeployment**

The Declaration of Principles determine that, in addition to the steps mentioned above, a further redeployment to specified locations will be implemented. On the other hand, the Interim Agreement, in which the issue is detailed, emphasizes that the Israeli military forces (including Israeli police and security forces) be redeployed to specified military locations.

The Interim Agreement determined only the temporal framework required, not the specific scope of the further redeployment nor its exact geographic demarcation. According to the agreement, the further redeployment was to be completed within 18 months after the date of the establishment of an elected Palestinian Governing Council, and executed at six-month intervals.

The Interim Agreement resolved that during the period of the further redeployment, there would be a gradual transfer of authority and areas of responsibility relating to the territory of the Palestinian Authority, which was to include the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, exclusive of the subjects and areas to be discussed within the Final

Status Agreement. The agreement clearly determined that Zone “C” (the regions sparsely populated by Palestinians but currently under complete Israeli control) would be gradually transferred to the Palestinian Authority excluding, as stated above, those subjects and areas to be negotiated within the Final Status Agreement.

According to the schedule established in the Interim Agreement, the first stage of the further redeployment was to begin on 7 September 1996, and would modify the map pertaining to zones ‘A,’ ‘B,’ and ‘C.’ This target date passed when Israel — unilaterally, without any prior consultation with the Palestinian Authority, and absent any linkage to the Hebron negotiations — refused to carry out the further redeployment of IDF forces in the field. This act represents a flagrant violation of the Interim Agreement.

The dates for the further redeployment were jointly rescheduled during the negotiation of the Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron. It was agreed that the first phase would be carried out during the first week of March 1997, and that all three phases should be completed not later than mid-1998.

### **What Next?**

An analysis of the agreement has brought the Palestinians to the conclusion that the IDF is to vacate most of the territory of the West Bank by 30 June 1998; more specifically, from the areas external to the borders of the Israeli settlements and those areas which are not considered to be vital to the internal or external security of Israel. According to their understanding, the IDF is to station itself along the new alignments, entailing complete Israeli control of security but only within defined and limited territories.

A further delay in the reopening of the negotiations on the Final Status Agreement or on the further redeployment, as well as the lack of implementation of the initial stages of this redeployment or any Israeli attempt to extremely minimize the three further redeployments, may lead the Palestinians to conclude that Israel is attempting to maneuver them into a position contrary to the spirit and substance of the agreements signed during the last three years. Such a conclusion may cast a heavy shadow on the entire peace process and may instigate rapid deterioration of the relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority as well as between Israel and the Arab world. Such a situation could be ignited if the Palestinians infer that Israel is retreating from her commitment to the signed agreements pertaining to the safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank, release of Palestinian prisoners, the Gaza Port and Airport, the redrawing of the Jericho Tract, or the removal of the economic siege and security impediments against the Palestinian territories.