

## Blog Post: Removing Israeli Settlers

In order to remove Jewish families from their illegally occupied homes in Hebron, Israel's security establishment mobilized 3000 soldiers and police officers. Those who were shocked at so large a mobilization likely saw its wisdom after reading of the level of resistance the troops encountered – not just from the two families, but from the hundreds of their supporters who came to their defense.

The episode is noteworthy for several reasons, including the fact that 12 Israeli soldiers faced disciplinary hearings after refusing to evict the Jewish settlers from their disputed West Bank properties. In all, 10 members of a conscript infantry unit and two commanders were court-martialed for insubordination.

As to the protests by the settlers and their allies, we have the Ha'aretz report: “According to police, 11 policeman and 4 activists were wounded. Three of the policemen were taken to hospital for treatment. Hebron Jewish community leaders said, however, that 26 activists were treated for injuries. Police took four protesters into custody. Hundreds of right-wing activists had barricaded themselves in three apartments in the market, and had encircled the market with barbed wire, oil drums, and burning tires. Dozens of teenagers, some of them wearing masks, took to the roofs of the market, from where they threw rocks, eggs, and light bulbs at security forces. Large numbers of police ascended the roofs, where they attempted to stop the stone-throwers.

Orit Struk, one of the leaders of Hebron's Jewish community, asked the activists to halt the clashes with security forces, following which the protesters stopped throwing stones . . . Serious damage was caused to the apartments during the evacuation, which were flooded with oil, petrol and flour used by protesters against the security forces. The evacuating forces discovered an improvised bunker in the third apartment, where three settlers had barricaded themselves inside with flammable oxygen tanks. Concrete blockades placed in the apartment also made it difficult to reach the second floor. IDF Engineering Corps troops were brought in to break through the bunker. Protesters had also locked and welded shut the doors to the apartments.

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Two questions:

1. How shall we distinguish between those soldiers who refused the order to join in the eviction action and soldiers who refuse to serve in the West Bank? Both cohorts are exercising a claim of selective conscientious objection. Is there a difference that enables us to praise, or at least accept, one such group while we condemn the other?

2. There seems to be a sudden flurry of activity on the peace front. While many observers believe that it will be impossible to arrive at a peace agreement without the participation of Hamas, it is clear for the time being that the current moves are the direct result of the separation of Hamas from Fatah and the continuing boycott of Hamas not only by Israel but by much of the international community. Prime Minister Olmert appears to be acting in accord with predictions made a few months ago, when his popularity had shrunk to two percent (just so that you can be

sure that is not a typo, I repeat: two percent) , that, having failed at war (last summer's in Lebanon), the only way he could redeem his reputation would be through a serious effort at peace. Indeed, if such an effort is under way when the final Winograd report assessing his behavior during the war is released, the report is unlikely to be the fatal blow it was widely assumed it would be.

Comes the question: Any serious peace plan will require very substantial removal of Israeli settlers from their settlements and their outposts in the West Bank. Given the level of protest anent the removal of two families from Hebron, what can we anticipate when it comes to the removal of many tens of thousands of settlers from the West Bank? How many times 3,000 soldiers will it take to remove them? Or, more directly: Are those – there are many – who claim that peace has been rendered impossible because of the settlements correct?

True, a significant number of the West Bank settlers are “non-ideological,” live where they do because the cost of living is so much lower than in Israel proper. They are “quality of life” settlers. But many are where they are for what they see as reasons of conscience, of root belief. As a practical matter, how can they be removed?

In fact, we may be quite certain that the scattered protests we have already witnessed – in Homesh, Hebron and elsewhere – have been undertaken less to score an immediate victory than to serve as a caution to the government: You think this was difficult? Just wait. Your promises to Bush and Abbas and anyone else are as chaff compared to our promise: We shall not be moved.

I raise this not as a rhetorical question. I do not counsel resignation, reluctant acceptance of the status quo. I remain committed to a two-state solution, and the state of Palestine cannot come into being unless most settlers remove themselves or are removed by the authorities. But that commitment is inadequate to answer the question: How can this be done?