

# **Bush To Give Israel Another Billion For 'Pullout Aid'**

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Israel will evacuate all 21 settlements in Gaza as well as four other enclaves in the West Bank

The United States plans to give Israel an additional one billion dollars in a post-withdrawal aid package to develop the Negev in the south and the Galilee in the north, The Jerusalem Post reported, citing U.S. officials.

The White House is still waiting for Israel to present a detailed plan before it approves the "substantial" funding, U.S. administration sources said.

"It's not clear yet over what period and how it would be divided between the Negev and the Galilee," said one official about the aid package, which would be part of next year's U.S. budget.

Developing the two regions was discussed during Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's meeting with Bush in Crawford, Texas in April this year.

"The Prime Minister believes that developing [the]

Negev and the Galilee regions is vital to ensuring a vibrant economic future for Israel. I support that goal and we will work together to make his plans a reality. Bush said.

The office of the Israeli Vice PM Shimon Peres has urged the U.S. to aid in infrastructure projects in the regions, which have sizable Arab minorities.

Israel also wants the U.S. to help in the process of relocating military bases, including training and hi-tech units in the Negev, as well as aid for improving education, infrastructure and employment in the Beduin sector there.

"The Israeli government is not only one of disengagement from Gaza, but also one of engagement in the Negev and Galilee," Peres said.

Under the disengagement plan, Israel will evacuate all 21 settlements in the Gaza Strip as well as four other enclaves in the northern West Bank in mid-August.

"It's a special circumstance. Israel's taking upon itself huge burdens," the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations Malcolm Hoenlein said of expanding the U.S. aid to Israel.

"It's aid because it's a critical part of where to put the displaced people [following disengagement], and the United States is committed to helping Israel."

The total U.S. aid to Israel in 2004 totaled \$2.853 billion, the vast majority of which went to the Israeli army. The grants were accompanied by \$3 billion in loan guarantees.

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