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**ISRAEL NEWS**  
*A collection of the week's news from Israel*  
*A service of the Bet El Twinning Committee of*  
*Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

**Quote of the Week...**

**PA Warns Terrorists it is Asked to Apprehend. PA Security Leave Moments Before Attack**

"There is a reluctance to transfer intelligence information to the PA. Last week, the Shin Bet gave it a try and transferred a list of names of low-level terror activists to Palestinian security officials in the Gaza Strip, asking that they be apprehended for interrogation. The PA security officials made do with warning the activists that "the Israelis are looking for you." What was revealed in the attack at the Karni crossing is also not encouraging. The investigation shows that the attack was timed to take place minutes before the crossing was closed for the day, when there is a minimal number of Palestinians present. PA security officials left the scene a little earlier, and on the Israeli side they could not find the PA liaison officer for 50 minutes prior to the attack." - From "Power of positive thinking" by Amos Harel (Haaretz Feb 4)

**Commentary...**

**Oslo Redux: Another "Historic Opportunity" We Should Miss**

By Naomi Ragen

Caught in a bind of misconception and delusion, the government of Israel signed agreements that resulted in the death of a thousand civilians, and injuries to thousands more.

In the beginning, when the bombings first started, we were told that we would proceed anyway, and not let the terrorists acts interrupt this "historic opportunity" for peace. Again and again, we were told Arafat wasn't behind these acts, so it was okay to honor agreements with him even as our children died in the streets.

Each time there was a terrorist attack, I asked myself: have they had enough yet? Enough self-delusion? And when nothing was changed, I knew the answer was no. They needed more convincing. More dead.

And here we are, after everything we've been through, and it seems the answer to "have they had enough yet" is still no.

Mr. Sharon is now planning a giant "good-will gesture" to the new government of Abu Mazen, who demands that the jails let out the terrorists caught and jailed at so much risk to our soldiers lives. And Mr. Sharon has agreed to release 900. He's agreed to open the checkpoints. He's agreed to give over five West Bank cities to the Palestinian Authority, Jericho first. All this in anticipation of the "historic opportunity" of a meeting with Mubarak, King Abdullah and Abu Mazen next week.

All of these things have been tried. Cities turned over to the Palestinian Authority became bomb factories, and 23 Israeli soldiers were killed in Jenin alone trying to undo this "good will gesture." We tried opening the jails, and the prisoners, freed, went back to the only life they knew, killing Israelis. We tried opening checkpoints, and what we got were suicide bombers in our pizza parlors.

Today, a 15 year-old Palestinian was caught near Nablus with a four-kilo suicide belt. Grenades were thrown in Gaza at a military patrol, injuring two IDF soldiers. The rocket attacks continue unabated at Gush Katif. Nothing has changed in the Palestinian Authority. And apparently nothing has changed in the self-delusion of our new coalition government.

As a citizen of Israel who voted with the majority of Israelis to remove Mr. Peres and his Oslo junkies from power, it is with a sense of deep betrayal and bitterness that I see my government preparing us for the next round of slaughter, preparing once again to "experiment" with "historic opportunities" to get another thousand Jews murdered.

What my government should be doing now is demanding all illegal weapons be handed over, as was demanded by the British government of the IRA, and the Americans in Fallujah. It should be dismantling terror networks and demanding good will gestures from the Palestinians to convince Israelis they can now be trusted. One of these gestures could be the shutting down of the hate-filled television and radio stations. Removing the hate-filled textbooks

from the classrooms. Demanding the turning over of all Hamas operatives. Instead, it does none of these things, because once again we are in a fake peace process that consists of one-sided Israeli concessions in exchange for more lame, baseless generalities about cease-fires.

Yes, a historic opportunity indeed to make the same fatal mistakes again. And when, I ask myself, will it finally be enough?(NaomiRagen.com Feb 3)

**The Peacemongers Are Back** By Caroline Glick,

Speaking with State Department personnel on Monday, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice gave form to the Palestinian state that now stands at the center of American Middle East policy. "The Israelis," she said, "were going to have to recognize that there was going to have to be land for – contiguous land for the Palestinian state to exist on."

Contiguous land? Well, how can there be contiguity between Judea and Samaria on the east and the Gaza Strip on the west unless Israel is split in two? It's simple geography. Either Israel will separate two sections of the Palestinian state or the Palestinian state will divide Israel in two. And now we know where America stands on the issue. The contiguity statement also bodes ill for Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley. After all, Israel's control of Jerusalem cuts off the Hebron and Bethlehem areas from Ramallah. And Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley would cut Jericho off from the rest of the Palestinian cities in Judea and Samaria.

The most amazing aspect of Rice's statement is that it was made before Israel and the Palestinians have even begun to negotiate. Then again, since the so-called road map is the only plan in town, we already know that America has joined Europe, the UN, Yossi Beilin and Vice Premier Shimon Peres in believing that at the end of the day, Israel will enable the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state. That state will share borders with Egypt and Jordan (and after Israel gives the Golan Heights to Syria, with Syria); will encompass all of Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip; and will have its capital in Jerusalem. In addition, there will be foreign troops in the areas to prevent Israel from defending itself.

On Tuesday, Rice made clear that now that America has joined the bandwagon of those calling for Israel's dismemberment, it should be able to patch up its relations with the EU. In her words, "This great alliance that has faced very grave threats now faces really remarkable opportunities in the world." The first opportunity she mentioned was "the opportunity to support the parties in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to try and find a two-state solution." It is odd that the US, in trying to patch up its relations with Europe, has preferred to give in to Europe's Palestinian fetish over say, building on common interests. As Robin Shepherd from the Center for International and Strategic Studies wrote in The Washington Post last week (the article also appeared in Tuesday's Jerusalem Post), the core of Europe's rift with America is Europe's emotional and irrational antipathy for Israel. And, as he warned, "Americans should now be aware that on one crucial issue, at least [i.e., Israel], it is Europe, and not America, that needs to clean up its act."

All the same, it is hard to feel too betrayed by America when the charge to strengthen Palestinian terrorists at the expense of Israel's national security is being led today – just as it was in 1993 – by the Israeli government.

Thursday, the "security cabinet" – stacked with security geniuses like Shimon "Arafat's Great" Peres and Haim "Israel is Bad" Ramon – decided to release 900 Palestinian terrorists from prison. This is just the latest of the Israeli payoffs to the democratically elected PA leader Mahmoud Abbas.

And what has Abbas done to deserve such largesse? He has purportedly reached an agreement with Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Fatah that involves these terrorist groups temporarily ceasing their attacks. (This is probably news to the residents of Gush Katif who had 15 mortars and rockets lobbed at them over the past few days.) During this temporary cessation of terrorist attacks, the terrorists will not be disarmed. If they desire, Abbas told a Russian newspaper this week, they can be integrated into the Palestinian security services. Those would be the same security services to which Russia pledged to donate helicopters; to which Turkey has asked to donate uniforms and guns; which Rice says America will train; and which President Bush wishes to finance.

And, if terrorists are dissatisfied with the pace of Israeli withdrawals or other appeasement measures, Abbas promised them that they can always go back to murdering Israelis.

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In addition to his mollification of terrorists, Abbas announced a ban on illegal weapons. That would seem a promising move, except that his announcement has no enforcement mechanism, is directed against "criminal elements," and makes no mention whatsoever of gun-toting terrorists.

Abbas has also deployed PA militias in Gaza. But these forces have been given strict orders to take no action against terrorists.

As to reform of Palestinian institutions, in one of his first "law enforcement" actions, Abbas instructed the PA's mufti to speed up the process of executing the 51 Palestinians who have been sentenced to death by Palestinian "courts." At least seven of those 51 were convicted of the capital crime of "collaborating" with Israel.

Then there is the question of economic transparency, which the US demands Abbas shore up. In an interesting move on this score, one of the first "economic" issues that the Palestinians raised this week was their demand to reopen the casino in Jericho. That particular edifice is the concrete manifestation of everything that is corrupt about the PA and about the "peace process" itself. Jibril Rajoub, Muhammad Rashid and Abbas have all been investors in the casino. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's adviser, Dov Weisglass, has represented casino shareholders. And the late Yossi Ginnosar, who set up meetings between Omri Sharon and Yasser Arafat back when Sharon first came into office four years ago, was both a member of the Board of Directors of the Peres Peace Center and an investor in the casino.

Perhaps most indicative of Abbas's intentions is his acceptance of Iran's invitation to conduct a state visit. This willingness to truck with global terrorists who are pursuing nuclear weapons aligns nicely with Abbas's visits to Syria and Lebanon, where he was mollified by dictators and terror masters while campaigning for the office he won in a largely uncontested, highly corrupt election.

It stands, of course, to reason – in the Orwellian world that so characterizes Israel when it is peace-drunk – that our leaders would look at all that Abbas has done and say, "Wonderful, let's give this guy a state!" So here we are. Our army has been ordered not to protect us, because the Palestinians will do that for us now. PA security forces will now be deployed in Judea and Samaria, as well as in Gaza. Wanted Palestinian terrorists – mass murderers – are free to go back to their homes. Israel won't harm them. Palestinian terrorists whom Israel caught and imprisoned will now be released on their own recognizance.

It's all in the interest of peace, after all, and we can rest assured that they won't return to killing, because they will all be required to sign declarations promising not to be terrorists anymore. That's crucial. Let's not forget that the terrorists who carried out the bombings in Cafe Hillel and outside Tzrifin military base in September 2003 signed precisely such declarations before they were released as part of a confidence-building gesture to Abbas.

In addition to rushing to embrace Abbas, Israel is doing everything it can to shore up Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak in the hope that he will protect us after we run away from Gaza. Crowned with legitimacy as a peacemaker after he and his security chief, Omar Suleiman, have spent the better part of two weeks getting Hamas and Islamic Jihad to agree to absolutely nothing – according to Hamas chieftain Khaled Mashal – Mubarak next Tuesday will host a peace party in Sharm e-Sheikh, where peace-drunk Israeli politicians and media flacks will gush, and Palestinians will demand that Israel take down the security fence and the roadblocks and release still more murderers from jail in order to give them confidence to make "hard steps" toward peace sometime later on down the line.

In the meantime, because of his vital role in the "peace process," Mubarak can safely assume that he will receive no flak from America for having imprisoned Ayman Nur, the leader of the only opposition party trying to challenge his one-party rule in Egypt. King Abdullah, too, can be sure he will pay no price for trying to prevent Iraq from becoming a democracy.

And herein lies the greatest irony of the peace process. American supporters of both Bush and Israel are now backing Sharon's plan to withdraw from Gaza and northern Samaria and Bush's plan for Palestinian statehood, claiming the world has changed since Oslo. They promise that Bush is going to cause a democratic revolution in the Arab world that will change the entire strategic balance in Israel's favor.

What they don't seem to remember is that the world had also changed after the fall of the Soviet Union and the 1991 Gulf War. Then, as now, there was an expectation that the Arabs would be forced to change the way they treated Israel and America. Then, as now, the reactionary forces in the region were saved by one thing – the peace process with Israel. Back in 1992 at Madrid and in 1993 at Oslo, the Arabs learned that the way to ensure the longevity of their authoritarian, terror-supporting and jihad-engendering regimes was by attacking Israel with olive branches. These earn legitimacy from the Jewish state and gratitude from the White House. Since peacemakers are of course indispensable, all thought of democracy must be put aside in the furtherance of a greater good.

So, here we are again, at the dawn of a new peace process which will bring no peace; will legitimize terrorists and the authoritarian regimes that support them; will weaken Israel's democratic institutions while endangering its citizenry; and will engender scorn for America and faith in Israel's eventual destruction in the hearts of millions of people who today waver between support for freedom and support for terror. (Jerusalem Post Feb 4)

## Look Who's 'Representing' Israel By Caroline Glick

As US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice embarked on her maiden voyage, it was reported that she departed from America armed with a new policy paper on how to implement the Quartet's road map produced by the James Baker Institute for Public Policy at Rice University.

According to Edward Djerejian, the former US ambassador to Syria who directs the Baker Center, the paper, with its detailed recommendations, is a "street map to the road map."

One of the things that make the paper significant is that it bears former US secretary of state James Baker's name. Not only did Baker serve under the president's father, he now plays a formal role in mobilizing international support for Iraqi reconstruction efforts.

As well, the team that composed the report included senior policy makers from the US, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, Canada and the World Bank. The US was represented by current Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs William Burns as well as by Norman Olsen, the political counselor at the US embassy in Israel. The PA was represented by security strongman Jibril Rajoub and by senior aides to Mahmoud Abbas, Yasser Arafat and Ahmed Qurei. Egypt was represented by Dictator Hosni Mubarak's senior adviser Osama El Baz and by General Hossam Khair Allah.

Israel had no official representation. Rather, the Jewish state was represented by none other than Yossi Beilin's Geneva Accord crowd. Amnon Lipkin Shahak and Shlomo Brom, signatories to that subversive agreement where private citizens tried to abscond with the government's sovereign power to determine foreign policy by negotiating the scandalously anti-Israel "accord," participated. They were joined by members of Beilin's EU-financed think tank, the Economic Cooperation Foundation.

Not surprisingly, the product this team produced and delivered to Rice is soft on Palestinian terrorism, soft on Palestinian democratization, and relentlessly harsh toward Israel – its sovereignty, its right to defend itself, and its ability to claim any right to retain any of the Israeli communities in Judea and Samaria.

The document makes no clear statement on the need for the Palestinians to dismantle terrorist organizations. Indeed, the term "terror organizations" is absent from the report. Instead, the Palestinian requirement to combat terrorism is reduced to demands on Israel to facilitate the training, arming and operation of the "reformed" Palestinian security services while not interfering with them in any way.

While the report pays lip service to the need for the PA to reform its governing institutions, its only clear statement on the end-product of reform is unabashedly authoritarian. The aim of all the reforms must be the "consolidat[ion of] Fatah as the main political player in Palestinian society."

And although the report makes no call for the destruction of Palestinian terror organizations and bucks up the authoritarian, corrupt PA, it calls for Israel to be treated with hostility and suspicion. The paper calls for the establishment of a multinational force that will implement the agreements. Implicit in this statement is the assumption that Israel will be prevented by the presence of this force from taking any measures to defend itself against attacks. International border crossings in Gaza and Judea and Samaria, including the weapons smuggling hub at the Philadephi Corridor which separates Gaza from Egypt, are to be controlled by the Palestinians. The report gives Egyptian forces a more prominent role in implementing the agreements than the IDF.

WHERE THE report's anti-Israel bias is most blatant is in its discussion of the Israeli communities in Judea and Samaria. The authors refer to their desire to see "The Palestinian people establish a viable state in the West Bank and Gaza" and make it clear that a precondition for the state's viability is that it be racially pure – entirely cleansed of Jewish communities. At the same time, they express their desire to "assure that Israel will continue to exist as the democratic homeland of the Jewish people and its other citizens." So in the authors' view, Israel is to be a state of all of its citizens while "Palestine" is to be Judenrein.

The report calls for the institution of a draconian regime in the Defense Ministry and the Justice Ministry to effectively prevent any building activities whatsoever from being conducted in the Israeli communities in Judea and Samaria. This regime, "The Special Office on Settlement Activities," will be obliged not simply to act as the enforcer of the attrition of these communities. The report determines that this body will be subordinate to the US embassy in Israel – effectively ceding Israeli sovereignty to the US.

The study even dares to dictate what propaganda moves must be made by the Israeli government to force the Israeli public to accept this policy. A close reading makes it clear that the result of this policy will be the expulsion of more than 400,000 Israeli Jews from their homes. This is so because the destruction of Israeli neighborhoods in Jerusalem is implicit in the section's opening paragraph, which mendaciously claims: "The US government policy has been based on the principle that there can be no acquisition of territory by war."

Not only does this sweeping and totally false statement necessarily include Jerusalem; it can easily be interpreted as saying that the only borders Israel can legitimately claim are the UN partition borders from 1947 since much of the land that makes up the 1949 armistice lines was acquired in war.

Perhaps it is reasonable that officials pushing a plan that would cause

Israel to effectively become the ward of the international community should not feel limited by the positions of the Israeli government as it makes its plans – sufficing instead to have Israel "represented" by radical free agents with Israeli citizenship.

But two questions still arise: Why is the US government sending its officials to participate in a "working group" which works to undermine the sovereignty of a US ally; and why is the Israeli government not taking legal action against private citizens who travel the world "negotiating" away the sovereign rights of the state while undermining the prerogatives of the Israeli government? (Jerusalem Post Feb 8)

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### **Confessions of a Settler** By Ruthie Blum

"You were at the demonstration?" a young acquaintance opens her eyes wide, not even attempting to hide her amazement. There appears to be no sting or sarcasm in her question. Nor even a hint of disdain or trace of nausea at the prospect. Yet I prepare for the worst.

"Yes," I answer defiantly - a habit acquired from spending my entire life on the wrong end of political correctness.

"Oh, of course," she nods, as though annoyed with herself for being so absent-minded. "You were covering it for the newspaper."

"No," I say, my tendency to enjoy shocking people intact, "I was there to participate in the protest."

"I can't believe it!" she shrieks, barely restraining herself from giving me a hug. "You're against disengagement?"

"If you ask me," I respond conspiratorially, empowered by her approval and by the huge turnout at the rally, "most of the country is against it."

Much as I love taking credit for remaining true to my ideals no matter how unpopular, I have to admit that this is one case where intellectual integrity does not require bravery. This is because the girl chatting with me is not only an Orthodox Jew, but one whose parents and younger siblings live on a settlement. So, in fact, this particular conversation is as painless as it is in some ways pointless.

Though far from immune to the pleasures of knocking on an open door, I am aware that it is a social luxury the residents of Gush Katif can ill afford right now. An indulgence none of us "settlers" can afford right now.

"From your mouth to God's ear," my companion says, scurrying off with a wave and a smile.

What I did not share with her was my disappointment at being just about the only secular person in the crowd of 150,000 who gathered at the Knesset on Sunday night to demand that Sharon hold a national referendum before going ahead with his evacuation plan. Nor did I mention my near certainty that nothing any of us does will make a difference as long as Mr. Unilateralism is prime minister - a sentiment, when expressed by the taxi driver who took me to the demonstration, I had pretended to dismiss as defeatist.

"You don't really think Sharon's going to be swayed by a bunch of settlers, do you?" the cabbie had asked, while taking my fare. And I hadn't let on for a second that I might agree.

"We can't let him get away with stealing our votes," I had answered, "without at least making ourselves heard." Furthermore, I'd added, "we're all settlers."

"No kidding," he'd sounded startled. "You don't look like one of them."

"What do 'they' look like?" I hadn't bothered to challenge. Even I'm not as perverse as that, after all. Particularly when in the presence of someone sympathetic. And anyway, I knew exactly what he'd meant.

One of them. That's what it boils down to, really. This is a state with two peoples: "them" and "us." Lest the perplexed outsider imagine that the two peoples in question are Jews and Arabs, let him be reeducated: In post-modern, post-Zionist Hebrew, "them" is a term used to define all the Jews who, after 1967, set up households on land the Israeli government begged them to populate and develop. Such people are known as "settlers" - when they aren't referred to as their synonym, "occupiers."

According to the same jargon, "us" is the word that defines the rest of the Jewish population who, before 1967, set up households on land the Israeli government begged them to populate and develop. Such people are commonly known as "Israelis" - when they aren't referred to as their synonym, "citizens."

Being of the old school of lexicography, I prefer a more precise use of the language. In my dictionary, every Jew who resides anywhere between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea is both a citizen and a settler of the Land of Israel. The only thing distinguishing one of us from another is a number: the number of generations we have been living within those borders; the number of countries from which we were expelled; the number of tyrants we were forced to endure; the number of pogroms we suffered; the number of crusades we survived; the number of times we tried to assimilate and the number tattooed on our forearms. All other distinctions are merely semantics.

As a citizen of Israel and the US, my attending the pro-referendum, anti-disengagement demonstration was an act of democracy. That it coincided with the elections in Iraq made it all the more relevant. That it was an opportunity to stand alongside other citizens with whom I have something meaningful in common made it all the more uplifting.

As a settler of Jerusalem, my expressing solidarity with the residents of Gaza and northern Samaria who are slated for transfer by the very leader they helped put in power was an act of conscience. That it coincided with my son

phoning to tell me his unit was being sent to Gaza made it all the more relevant. That it was an opportunity to stand alongside other settlers and be counted made it all the more uplifting.

"Let the people decide!" was the theme of this event, to which busloads upon busloads of Jews from all over the country came to try and alter government policy peacefully, giving new meaning to the phrase "the ingathering of exiles."

"YOU WERE at the demonstration?" an old friend looks at me as though I had lost my marbles. But then, this is a guy who wouldn't miss a Rabin assassination memorial bash come hell or tsunami. "What are you, one of them?"

"Yes," I say proudly. "And so are you. You just haven't grasped it yet." (Jerusalem Post Feb 8)

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### **Disengagement or Disaster?** By Serena Weil

Israel is presently grappling with a heart rending, soul-searching dilemma. Some call it disengagement, redeployment, resettlement; others call it evacuation, withdrawal, retreat. Living as we do in a mire of misinformation, we are inundated with a never-ending tsunami of words and images. At best, they portray the "news" - bits and pieces of information - but they rarely present the entire picture in intelligent context; at worst, they distort reality to the point where the consumer of all this news cannot possibly differentiate between truth and falsehood. And when the stakes are as high as they are in Israel today, the lack of dependable information to inform public opinion is downright frightening.

Recently, in the Israeli paper Hatzofeh, Boaz Haetzni enumerated a number of unpopular, seldom reported facts. They are worth repeating together with the disturbing questions they engender.

1. GAZA vs. KATIF: A Clearer picture. Historically, the city of Gaza (and its surroundings) is part of Biblical Israel, included in G-d's divine promise to the Jewish People. Jews have resided in Gaza from Biblical times until 1948 when, as the result of Arab violence, they were forced to leave. The city contains ruins of synagogues, a Jewish cemetery, and archeological finds of Jewish origin. A Jewish presence in the Gaza area (known as the Gaza Strip) was re-established in the wake of the Six Day War after 1967. Known as Gush Katif (the Katif Block), it comprises 22 communities and numbers 8,500 inhabitants and comprises only 12% of the Gaza Strip.

2. CAN THE IDF LEAVE GAZA? The IDF already left the Gaza Strip (!) eleven years ago as part of the Oslo agreements. Since then the Strip has been governed by the Palestinian Authority (under Arafat). Israel remained in Gush Katif. The IDF manned points of entry into Katif and at the border-like road blocks. They enter Gaza itself only when terrorist activity makes their entry necessary. Meanwhile, a monstrous terror network of worldwide proportions has surfaced in Gaza. Constant shelling of nearby Israeli settlements and cities, suicide bombers, shootings, and mines have become daily fare. (Many, thank G-d, miss their mark.) The media barely mentions them before going on to more "interesting" news.

Retreating from Katif would bring the cities of Ashkelon, Netivot, and Ofakim into the range of Arab missiles in the south. As it did in Lebanon, the Hezbollah terrorist organization intends to bring thousands of missiles into Gaza as well. The highly successful results of the terrorist organizations in the recent Palestinian Authority elections in Gaza do not bode well for peaceful intentions or resolutions. With additional, far ranging weapons in Gaza, the long arm of Hezbollah will bring not only Ashkelon, but the port of Ashdod, Beersheva and the nuclear reactor in Dimona within firing range. Israel has to be utterly insane to allow this to happen.

3. WHOSE WATER IS TASTIER? Israel is presently supplying Gaza with water. After Oslo and the Israeli retreat from Gaza, as a result of total Arab/Palestinian Authority mismanagement and greed, vast amounts of water were pumped from the wells in the area, the salt level rose drastically, and the water is no longer potable. Humane Israel, unwilling to deny water to thirsty Arabs, now provides for their needs from its own water supply. The IDF also forces the Arabs to treat their sewage and refrain from pouring it into the sea. In addition to severe pollution, the sewage destroys the filters from a large purification plant in nearby Ashkelon.

Sharon speaks of further withdrawals in northern Samaria which sits atop one of Israel's largest aquifers and main sources of water. Once in Arab hands, it is expected that the Arabs will, as they have done throughout the rest of Judea and Samaria, pump water without plan or thought for the future, thus endangering vital water sources in the Jezreel Valley. The oft-banded solution of treating sea water would cost billions of dollars. Can Israel afford to place her precious and limited water supply in the hands of her Arab neighbors?

4. DEMOGRAPHY & GEOGRAPHY and other fraudulent claims: Gaza, we are told, is the most crowded place in the world. The Arabs, they say, need land, living space! Well, so does Tel Aviv. The population density in the city of Tel Aviv is eleven times higher than in Gaza!

Not only that. The much maligned Katif area, on only twelve percent of the Gaza Strip, covers approximately ninety square miles! Does anyone really think that giving this pittance of the Strip as a gift to the Arabs will solve their demographic problems? (It is highly suggested that the reader open a map of the Middle East to verify the size of Israel, of the Gaza Strip

and of Katif. If Israel is infinitesimal, then Katif is infinitely more so!)

Perhaps Egypt, a huge country, would like to contribute a portion of its vast holdings in Sinai to its fellow Arabs. Sinai was never officially part of Egypt (just as Judea and Samaria were never officially part of Jordan). It is devoid of settlements - absolutely empty except for several tourist locations (originally built and set up by Israel) and best of all, it borders Gaza. Could there be a more perfect, fitting, humane solution to lessen the population density in Gaza?

Gush Katif was built on virgin sand dunes which even the Arabs had never exploited. The constantly attacked and bombarded community of Kfar Darom was built on swampy land which was purchased at full price by Jews during the time of the British Mandate. The Jews have turned the entire Katif area into a mini Garden of Eden. Eleven percent of all Israeli agricultural exports come from this tiny spot on the map. No wonder the Arabs living in their squalid cities nearby have dreams of inheriting it!

5. ECONOMICS - What's the Price? According to government assessments, direct costs for disengagement will be upwards of six billion NIS (one and one half billion U.S. dollars). Since this figure was released, the Knesset upped it by offering larger restitution to the settlers. (The previous amounts were rather parsimonious and it was felt that a bit more generosity would make things easier for all concerned.) Add to this related expenses such as additional security for settlements within the Green Line which will now be within Gaza's firing range; unemployment for the several thousand evacuated families; establishing new communities, new schools or classrooms for the thousands of Katif children who will be evacuated; new social services; and the necessary psychological counseling and help for those evacuated (this promises to be a highly traumatic experience, to put it mildly), Etc., etc.

No country, and surely not the U.N. or the E.U., is offering to reimburse or assist Israel with disengagement. The Israeli taxpayer will be expected to foot the entire bill. All the advances Israel has so painfully made in the past ten years on the economic front will be wiped out. And the price of real estate all along the shrunken new border will fall drastically. (Who will want to live next to Gaza?) Disengagement promises to be an economic disaster.

6. THE ARMY - What affect will disengagement have on it? Is the Israel Defense Force here to evacuate Jews from their homes, or to protect them from their enemies? Discomfort at the idea of the army forcefully evacuating peaceful citizens is widespread. So much so that the government changed gears and decided the police would be given the job while the army stood guard to make sure the Arabs don't take advantage of the evacuation and aim their missiles in the direction of the evacuees.

There is also the well founded fear that a large number of soldiers and police will refuse to take part in the disengagement. And if nonetheless it does take place, it is feared that tens of thousands of young people across the country will be so disillusioned that many of them will refuse to serve when they are called up. Huge numbers of youngsters from youth movements and yeshivas, the ones you see at the demonstrations and on street corners passing out flyers, are passionately anti-disengagement. These youths tend to be some of our best soldiers and a high percentage, out of all proportion to their numbers, of officers. Which is why the government is taking such a hard stand against conscientious objectors whom they view as a "threat to democracy". Many older people will refuse to continue to serve in the Reserves as well.

7. DEMOCRACY or DICTATORSHIP? Sharon ran for office on a platform diametrically opposed to this plan. His own Likud party overwhelmingly rejected the proposal in an internal Likud referendum. After much political wrangling and the firing of two cabinet ministers, Sharon finally managed to obtain Knesset approval for his plan although the law approving the financial restitution has not yet been passed.

No legitimate government, however, has the right to oust people from their legal homes by means of a highly questionable order and without recourse to due process of law. No government has the moral right to make historic changes and cede parts of its historic homeland with only a slim majority and a highly unstable minority coalition. Just as no government, even with a large majority, has the moral right to legitimize murder, rape or robbery. Years ago, Yossi Sarid, one of Israel's extreme, leading Leftists, proclaimed: The day that an order is given to transfer [Arabs] from their homes, an order which is patently illegal and immoral, will be the Day of Refusing Orders. ... We will not fulfill an order to transfer [Arabs], nor will our children or our students fulfill such an order. How, then, can he legitimize transferring Jews?

Democracy does not mean the dictatorship of the many over the few. Democracy is built on a shared set of values; its laws are supposed to give form to these values. Destroying the basic values underpinning democracy, and ripping apart the social fabric and shared values of a nation destroys democracy itself.

Where might all this lead? The papers are rife with reports of detention centers being set up for reluctant settlers, their wives and children; of special, speedy courts of "justice" to deal with resisters; with special police training courses hastily organized to program the police to deal with the expected, traumatic expulsion. (All this while it was just announced that over nine hundred convicted terrorists will be released from Israeli jails as a sign of Israel's "good will").

Remember, we are not speaking of evacuating an enemy. We are speaking of 8,500 Israeli citizens who settled an empty, new area with full government approval and are now being ousted after thirty years because a prime minister, without the necessary democratic sanctions, has decided they must leave.

8. DID YOU SAY DISENGAGEMENT? From what? According to the government's own declarations, Israel will continue to supply the Palestinian Authority in Gaza with 1) water; 2) electricity; 3) communications (a telephone system); 4) food, medical and other supplies, just as we do now. Oh yes, and also employment in Israel. No one expects Gaza to support itself or provide employment for its people. Everyone - the entire world - expects Israel to help the new "fledgling state" along. Israel assumes she will fill all these needs although she insists that in case of trouble or terrorist activity, she will feel free to re-enter Gaza whenever necessary. (Just imagine the world's reaction to that!)

What then will be different? What exactly is being "disengaged"? Only one thing. Jewish communities in one small corner of the Gaza Strip. They are being evacuated, transferred, "resettled" - all the things Israel would never allow to be done to its Arab citizens or neighbors. Judenrein at the hands of the Israeli government.

9. WHAT IS SHARON THINKING? No one seems to know. If the above is an accurate description of the situation, based on true, objective facts (and it is), how could any normal, intelligent person choose this path?

Sharon has led us to a Palestinian state. He gave his approval to the Road Map whose cease-fire cost scores of Jewish lives. He approved the infamous prisoner swaps which put an end to hope for finding or releasing Ron Arad, the missing Israeli pilot. And now he is taking us further along the road to destruction with his new plan. Why?

While there are a few souls who feel that Sharon is taking a brave step forward and has the best interests of the country at heart, there are many more who are doubtful. The rumors are that he is depressed, demented, or wants to go down in history as the great Man of Peace after having been demonized as Israel's worst war-monger. There are other, even more disturbing theories at large.

Zvi Hendel a Knesset member from Gush Katif, and a former friend of Sharon who spent years working in close contact with the Prime Minister, has an different explanation. Both of Sharon's sons were involved in highly publicized, highly questionable, extremely lucrative, international business transactions. There was grave evidence of illegalities and the country was waiting for a judicial decision to indict. Suddenly, when things became exceedingly uncomfortable, Sharon dropped a bombshell and announced his disengagement plan. It immediately replaced the stories of his sons in all the media and has kept them out of the public eye. The indictments are also still on hold.

It is believed by many that this sudden bombastic political decision, which ran counter to Sharon's entire history and career (he was called the "Father of the Settlement Movement" and was a close and constant advocate of settlement activity), which conflicted with all his previous statements, promises and campaign platform, was a way of turning the public attention away from his private troubles. If the settlers had to be the sacrificial lamb, so be it. Better them than Sharon's sons.

Hendel's accusations were made publicly and were detailed. The media made mention but chose not to dwell on them and they were "lost" in the governmental tsunami of determination for the disengagement plan.

10. WHAT ELSE IS LOST? Much has been "lost" in the media reports. Not only the legalities of the Sharon family affairs, but many of the above uncomfortable facts and observations. The settlements in Gaza have existed for more than thirty years. Families have four generations in the area. There is rarely a family in Israel which doesn't have Israelis all over the country have a relative, a neighbor's relative or a friend in Katif. Most of the population - truly a silent majority - is distinctly uncomfortable with disengagement although they have few public avenues open to express their discomfort. (The media gives expression primarily to the left.) The more active and vocal section of the populace that supports Katif and the settlements and is thoroughly opposed to "disengaging" is dubbed "the extreme right" by the media. There is never - or very rarely - an "extreme" left. Disengagement ("evacuation" is a more accurate term) of Jews from the area - is not a simple, administrative decision. It is truly a moment of crisis for Israel.

Nor is disengagement a legitimate legal, democratic decision. Sharon consistently refuses to consider either a referendum on disengagement or new elections, even though two years after the elections he still does not have a stable, dependable coalition to pass. Nor has he been successful in passing the annual budget (which is why he is turning somersaults to put a coalition together. Without an approved budget, new elections are in the offing whether he wants them or not.) which he needs in order to assure funds for the evacuation of Katif. Yet he has engaged the country in a disastrous process. Anti-democratic, anti-Zionistic, militarily and economically incomprehensible.

Add that to the national, emotional and religious issues which have been stirred up and you wonder if the man has not gone mad?

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