



Jerusalem 6:37; Toronto 7:55

Commentary...

The Case Against Disengagement

By Yuri Shtern

Quintus Tertullian, a father of the early Church, wrote, Credo, quia absurdum – "I believe it because it is absurd." By this he meant that if something is logical it does not need faith; one only needs faith to believe in something that is not logical.

This is the secret that explains the public's support for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's unilateral disengagement plan from the Gaza Strip.

It makes no sense, but it is hard for the public to believe the prime minister is not using logic, so they have decided to stand behind him on faith. Its champions claim either that there is more to the plan than we are being told, or that we don't understand its complexities.

The word "disengagement" is a public relations ploy, because Sharon's plan does not provide for disengagement. We will still supply Palestinians with work visas, still supply electricity and other utilities, and still need to send in our military because no peaceful resolution has been made.

There are suggestions that the deal has won us concessions from the Americans, which will strengthen our hold on important parts of Judea and Samaria. But looking at the plan it is clear that no such benefits exist. In fact, the plan has clear negative consequences for Israel:

No matter how often the prime minister tells us that we are leaving the Gaza Strip voluntarily, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Israel is being driven out.

His plan shows that terror pays. It also empowers the most radical and violent circles in the Palestinian leadership, because our voluntary withdrawal will be perceived as a bigger victory than any peace plan resolution, proving that Arafat's intifada policy is working.

By violently transferring Jews out of the Gaza Strip, the prime minister is giving tacit approval to the principle that the Palestinians can have a state in which Jews are not permitted to live, while acknowledging that Israel will ultimately become a binational state.

Since the Six Day War Israel's position has been that Judea, Samaria, and Gaza are disputed territories and that Israel may withdraw from some, but certainly not all the territories.

It was clear that the precedent set by withdrawing from all the territories claimed by Egypt would not apply to Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip. Withdrawal back to the Green Line seriously undermines that position.

Israel has never been willing to uproot any Jewish settlements without a final peace agreement. By doing this in the framework of a one-sided withdrawal from Gaza, it will be breaking the taboo on the dismantling of settlements.

This first step will sound the death knell for the settlements of Judea and Samaria. This action will also create a deep moral crisis and antagonism in Israeli society, and bring us not one millimeter closer to peace.

Finally, there is the damage to Israeli democracy.

The prime minister put his plan to a Likud Party referendum of his own choosing. He lost the referendum, but chose to ignore the result. Previous prime ministers did not act without the approval of a majority of the cabinet. This prime minister could not gain the approval of a majority of his cabinet, so he fired the ministers who disagreed with him, and now has a majority.

Withdrawal from Gaza, a central point in the Labor Party's agenda in the 2003 elections, was rejected by the vast majority of the electorate. By adopting Amnon Mitzna's discredited proposal Likud is in effect saying the Likud was wrong, and there is no alternative to the Left's agenda.

This undermines and demoralizes the national camp, which Likud once led. The Left, which was defeated by the Israeli public, is now being rehabilitated by Sharon.

Withdrawal from Gaza will not improve Israel's image in the world as the prime minister claims, and it will not give us a stronger claim to territory in

ISRAEL NEWS

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Judea and Samaria. The decision of the International Court of Justice on the security fence and the follow-up anti-Israeli General Assembly resolution demonstrate that disengagement won't enhance Israel's international standing.

It's worth recalling that Sharon's disengagement plan also includes dismantling four settlements in Samaria and an agreement to halt all further construction of settlements in Judea and Samaria. That gives us a bitter

preview of things to come.

Withdrawal will only bring the enemy closer to our population centers. Following our flight from Gaza, the terrorists will be lobbing Kassam rockets into Ashkelon with far less difficulty than they do today.

It will also cripple our intelligence-gathering abilities in the area. These unilateral concessions of such strategically important real estate will not bring any benefit. They will dramatically weaken our position in Judea and Samaria, and eventually in our capital, Jerusalem.

Those who prefer to believe in a plan with no rational basis should at least acknowledge that they believe in it "because it is absurd." (Jerusalem Post Aug 17)

The writer, an MK, is chairman of the Internal Affairs and Environment Committee, and co-chairman of the Knesset Christian Allies Caucus.

When it Comes to Israel... By Jay Bushinsky

At first glance it was just another prosaic headline. "Militants' prevent resumption of work in the seaports," Haaretz said.

The key word, which appeared in quotation marks, referred to port workers in Haifa and Ashdod who reportedly circulated among their colleagues "threatening physical harm to them" if they ended their sanctions and went back to work full-time.

If the same headline had appeared in The New York Times over a story by its own correspondent, or from Associated Press or Reuters, the reader would have understood it to mean that armed Palestinians had taken control of the Jewish state's two vital port facilities.

This is because the Western news media has decided that the Palestinians who resort to suicide bombings, detonate vehicles packed with explosives, stage highway ambushes and break into private homes to kill Jewish settlers are "militants," not

"terrorists."

The implication is that the former are motivated by a political cause which is worthy of understanding or sympathy – the expulsion of Israelis from what they regard as "Palestinian land" – whereas the latter are fanatics who have no moral constraints or human compassion.

Webster's dictionary defines a "militant" as someone "engaged in warfare," someone who is "fighting, combative and aggressive."

Thus the Palestinian woman who blew herself up in Haifa's Maxim restaurant or the Palestinian man who detonated his explosives belt in Jerusalem's Cafe Moment were "militants," not "terrorists."

How absurd! A subsequent edition of Webster's defines a "terrorist" as someone who "uses terror as a means of coercion" and terror as "bombing committed by groups in order to intimidate the population or government into granting their demands."

Does that definition not apply to the Hamas crews who fire their Kassam missiles at Sderot to kill and maim Israeli civilians indiscriminately? Their leaders say they will launch one every day until Israel's forces evacuate the Gaza Strip. Is that not intimidation?

The fact that al-Qaida's operatives in Iraq and their diehard Ba'athist allies have been using identical tactics to the Palestinians' Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Tanzim and all the other West Bank and Gaza Strip fanatics does not affect international journalism's political lexicon or editorial stylebook.

In Iraq, where Americans are the prime targets, they are "terrorists," proving that Israel is perceived differently. The Jewish state's interests, ambitions and objectives are not compatible with those of the US and its Western allies.

When it comes to Israel the name of the diplomatic game is

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evenhandedness, not empathy.

Not by chance was Israel excluded from the first Gulf War 13 years ago. Its participation, which might have been a tactical asset for the US and the make-believe "coalition" of Arab and European states, did not want the Israelis in their crusade against Saddam Hussein.

Nor did the Bush Administration want them to fight in the second Gulf War last year.

It is about time Israel's policy makers faced the fact that their state is not only the odd man out in the Middle East, but also a loner in the international community – not invited to join NATO, not a candidate for membership in the European Union (unlike Turkey), and not part of any of the United Nations' regionally-based blocs (hence never elected to the Security Council despite 56 years of membership).

The late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin was right when he quoted the biblical passage defining Israel as a nation that dwells alone. As Walter Cronkite would say at the end of his news shows, "And that's the way it is."

The writer is a veteran journalist. (Jerusalem Post Aug 18)

How Arafat's Gunmen Suppress the News By Jeff Jacoby

Two days after the liberation of Baghdad, a senior news executive at CNN disclosed that his network had for years been sanitizing its reports from Iraq. In an op-ed column titled "The news we kept to ourselves," Jordan Eason confessed that CNN routinely chose not to report on the atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein's regime. To have revealed the truth, he wrote, "would have jeopardized the lives of Iraqis, particularly those on our Baghdad staff."

Suppressing news by threatening reporters with violence or death is one of the dirty little secrets of Middle East journalism. In his 1989 memoir *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, Thomas Friedman wrote that "physical intimidation" was a major impediment to honest reporting from Beirut during the years when southern Lebanon was in the grip of Yasser Arafat's PLO.

"There were . . . stories which were deliberately ignored out of fear," Friedman admitted. "How many serious stories were written from Beirut about the well-known corruption in the PLO leadership. . . ? It would be hard to find any hint of them in Beirut reporting before the Israeli invasion." Instead of reporting what they knew, journalists censored themselves. "The Western press coddled the PLO," Friedman acknowledged. "For any Beirut-based correspondent, the name of the game was keeping on good terms with the PLO."

That was more than 20 years ago. Has anything changed?

In the wake of the 1993 Oslo Accord, Arafat and the PLO assumed control of the Palestinian population in Gaza and the West Bank. Reconstituted as the Palestinian Authority, or PA, they lost no time cracking down on the press.

Arafat's "security forces have made more than 30 arrests of journalists and editors," the Columbia Journalism Review noted in 1996. "Although they have been almost completely freed from the Israeli yoke of military censorship, Palestinian journalists are being fettered in new ways. Reporters Sans Frontieres, a watchdog group based in Paris, released a report . . . deploring the Palestinian Authority's policy of suspending newspapers and employing threats and violence against journalists. . . . The result is a tame, compliant press that . . . rarely engages in investigative journalism and publishes only . . . 'vegetarian' criticism of the regime."

Khaled Abu Toameh, a veteran Arab reporter who covers Gaza and the West Bank for *The Jerusalem Post* and *US News and World Report*, noted recently that no credible, professional reporter can get a job at the three major Palestinian newspapers. "There are many professional Palestinian journalists," he told the Middle East Forum last April, but they can only find work with the non-Palestinian press.

Unfortunately, the intimidation of journalists extends to the wider Arab and Western media too.

On Sept. 11, 2001, Americans were shocked by footage of Palestinians dancing in the streets to celebrate the terrorist attacks on the United States. But those scenes disappeared from the airwaves soon after -- not because they weren't newsworthy, but because the Palestinian Authority gave orders to suppress them.

An Associated Press cameraman was summoned to a PA security office and warned not to release the material he had filmed. A top aide to Arafat told the AP's Jerusalem bureau that if the footage were aired, "we cannot guarantee the life" of the cameraman. Other news outlets were likewise ordered not to use any images of the 9/11 revelry. Most of them caved, and the images dried up.

Journalists like to cultivate a reputation for fearlessness, for a publish-and-be-damned commitment to putting out the story no matter what. The reality is not always so heroic. Sometimes the media are not fearless at all -- and their coverage, or lack of it, can amount to collaboration with dictators or thugs.

Meanwhile, the intimidation goes on.

In June, Abu Toameh reported in *The Jerusalem Post* that the Al Aksa Martyrs Brigade, an armed wing of the PLO's Fatah faction, admitted responsibility for a beating that left an Agence France Press photographer with two broken arms. In July, the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate -- an Arafat front group -- warned that any reporter caught covering clashes between rival groups in Gaza would be punished severely. Just last week, armed gunmen threatened to attack journalists working for Arab satellite stations unless they

stopped covering the current turmoil in the Palestinian Authority.

"People in the rest of the world . . . do not get an accurate picture of what happens in the region," Abu Toameh said in April. "Partly to blame are foreign journalists who allow themselves to be misled. . . . The bulk of the blame, however, rests with the PA, whose tyrannical approach and control of the media creates an atmosphere of intimidation and fear." For too many journalists, it seems, keeping on good terms with Palestine's bad men is still the name of the game. (The Boston Globe Aug 15)

Jeff Jacoby is a syndicated columnist for The Boston Globe.

Don't Take the Diaspora for Granted By Isi Leibler

There are alarming indicators suggesting that the erosion of the Israel-Diaspora relationship is reaching an all-time low. The extent of this downturn is minimized by exaggerated media exposure of enthusiastic statements of support for Israel by a few Jewish organizational leaders.

The reality is that the vast majority of Diaspora Jews, young people in particular, are no longer inclined to regard Israel as pivotal to Jewish life. For today's emerging leadership the Shoah and the struggle to create a Jewish state have become dim memories. They are exposed to a cultural environment and media that tend to demonize the Jewish state and encourage them to pitch in with the anti-Zionist chic which is socially more acceptable these days.

The situation is compounded because a large proportion of Jewish young adults are not conversant with the case for Israel and are increasingly brainwashed by negative media caricatures portraying Israel as an oppressive occupier. Many fail to appreciate that the Arab delegitimization and demonization of the Jewish state are simply new manifestations of anti-Semitism.

Over the past two years there has been a major effort to revitalize pro-Israel campus activism. Yet even now the vast majority of Jewish faculty members shy away from confronting the aggressive and triumphant Left liberal Arab coalition, and in some cases they themselves lead the anti-Israeli pack. Thus, albeit with some impressive exceptions, the majority of Jewish students in North America and Europe appear to be either indifferent or lack the courage to stand up and fight back.

What makes the alarm bells ring louder is that in recent months mainstream Jewish leadership groups have also begun to criticize Israel's defense policies, even mocking Zionism's most hallowed creeds.

Take for example the resolution questioning the government's disengagement policy carried at the Convention of the US Reform movement -- America's largest denominational group. It was followed by a letter from Rabbi David Saperstein, a key Reform spokesman, to US Secretary of State Colin Powell.

Interspersed with motherhood statements condemning terrorism, Arafat, and the impact of Arab carnage, Saperstein urged Powell to pressure Israel to return to the negotiating table, as if Israel was being deliberately delinquent. He also urged Congress to take account of Israel's human rights violations and "the troubling conditions of the Palestinians."

In the past those in the American Reform movement have been critical of Israeli policies, and it is not unusual or unreasonable for them to position themselves as Left-wing liberal critics, though many rank-and-file members of the Reform movement surely cringe at such expressions by their politicized rabbinical leadership.

Yet apparently there was not even a ripple within the Israeli government. At the very least, the foreign minister could have instructed one of his diplomatic representatives to publicly challenge Saperstein to explain the obvious: How is Israel to sit down with representatives of a group still controlled by a corrupt and unreconstructed Arafat who continues to stoke the fires of terror?

Such negative outbursts are not the sole domain of the North American Reform movement. A few weeks ago the London Jewish Chronicle carried an article by Rabbi Pini Dunner, a charismatic young Orthodox rabbi, who until recently officiated at the trendy Saatchi Synagogue. With a reputation of having been a public defender of Israel, Dunner now writes he is discomfited by Israeli policies -- not out of enmity, God forbid, but because "we have a tremendous compassion" for the Jewish state.

This compassion leads him to bitterly condemn Ariel Sharon's appeal to French Jews to emigrate to Israel. This Dunner defines as "but the latest example of Zionist hutzpa," accusing Sharon of "pouring oil on the flames of an already tense situation and interfering in matters which were none of his business."

So here we have it: A leading Orthodox rabbi complains that anti-Semitism is not the business of an Israeli prime minister.

Dunner's plaint is that "old habits die hard" and that Zionists should stop exploiting persecution and Jewish suffering. His judgment, which he seems to express with perverse satisfaction, is that most Diaspora Jews, including Zionists, would never contemplate making aliya.

And he extends his diatribe by stating that the last place unhappy French Jews should contemplate moving to would be Israel. Indeed, adds our Orthodox rabbi, "If I were a Jew nervous for my safety, I might just

move from Israel to France. Because what the past 50-odd years have proven beyond doubt is that Israel offers no solutions for anti-Semitism – and it probably never will."

This outrageous Jewish Chronicle article, combined with Saperstein calling on Secretary Powell and the US Congress to be more evenhanded, exemplifies an undermining of the most hallowed central pillars of Israel-Diaspora relations. If we ignore these trends we do so at our collective Jewish peril.

Such trends have been percolating for some time and a good measure of the blame rests on the shoulders of our own leadership.

Israeli governments have been guilty of accumulated neglect ever since then deputy foreign minister Yossi Beilin declared open season and welcomed Diaspora criticism of every facet of Israeli life. In a further step, bound to destroy bridges with the Diaspora, he instructed Israeli diplomats to dispense with the services of politically influential Jewish leaders in promoting the case for Israel at all levels.

Prime Minister Rabin then told AIPAC and other activist Jewish organizations that they had become superfluous and should leave the advocacy of Israeli policies to the Israeli government.

It was all part of the Oslo euphoria. If we were engaged in an "irreversible peace process," why bother with PR?

The Foreign Ministry all but closed down its hasbara division. And so today we reap the disastrous consequences of that policy.

What can be done now? President Katzav and Diaspora Affairs Minister Natan Sharansky are making valiant efforts to reverse the tide by opening up new channels of communication with the Diaspora leadership. The possibility of actually creating a formal Diaspora consultative body to liaise with the government is being considered.

But such initiatives can only succeed with the active cooperation of other government organs, especially the Prime Minister's Office, the Foreign Affairs Ministry and the Education Ministry. A coordinated effort in this direction could create a new atmosphere among Diaspora leaders which could percolate down to grass roots.

The tide can be reversed because, deep down, most Diaspora Jews realize that their Jewish identity is meaningless if the role of Israel is trivialized. In the long term a determined effort by the Israel government will strengthen Jewish identity, bring about a greater awareness of the need for Jewish education and ultimately strengthen bridges with Israel.

But the time for action is now! (Jerusalem Post Aug 18)

The writer is senior vice president of the World Jewish Congress.

Muslim Power in Canada By David Ouellette

The Great White North hardly registers as a hotbed for Islamic political activity. Yet in the run-up to last June's Canadian federal elections, Islamic lobbies exerted unprecedented pressure on electoral candidates and actively pursued the emergence of a Muslim voting bloc.

A key player among the seemingly endless list of Islamic groups and lobbies operating in Canada is the Canadian Islamic Congress (CIC). The CIC is a numerically small yet extremely prolific outfit presided by Egyptian-born Mohammed Elmasry.

Two full months prior to the declaration of general elections, the CIC published a report named "Election 2004. Towards Informed and Committed Voting." Based on an analysis of public statements, electoral objectives and legislative voting records of each of Canada's 301 elected parliamentarians, the CIC evaluated each one's record on issues such as the promotion of closer economic ties to Muslim countries and the championing of the Palestinian cause.

While virtually all the MPs of the New Democratic Party, a party strongly opposed to American foreign policy and critical of Israel, scored passing grades, 68 out of 71 of the pro-American, pro-Israel Conservative Party's MPs failed the CIC's evaluation.

The ruling Liberal Party MPs scored an average of B. The report identified 101 electoral districts where Canadian Muslims hold a 1.8% to 13.5% swing vote. The report was sent to all MPs and their opponents.

A few days ahead of the federal elections, three Canadian Muslim leaders met at Concordia University in Montreal to discuss Islamic "committed voting." The event, however, turned into an anti-Zionist, Jew-bashing fest.

The meeting's tone could be felt at the hall's entrance: flyers calling to boycott Mount-Royal Liberal deputy and Justice Minister Irwin Cotler, a human rights lawyer who defended such political prisoners as Nelson Mandela and Natan Sharansky and a strong advocate of Israel's right to defend its citizens from Palestinian terrorism.

Bearded men and hijab-clad women filled the room. A handful of representatives from the Canadian Marxist-Leninist Party also attended, nodding in sync to all the speakers' statements. I was the only reporter present.

CIC President Mohammed Elmasry opened the meeting by saying: "The Conservatives' strong performance in recent polls should alarm Muslims" since, in his view, Conservative leader Stephen Harper espouses an extreme-right agenda. Mohammad Sherif Kamel of the Canadian Muslim Forum sounded the same warning bell: "The Conservatives are so right-wing they put Bush to shame; its members are all racists and Zionists."

In addition to defeating the Conservatives, the Muslim leaders want to shake Canadian Muslims out of their electoral apathy. While the last national voting

rate hovered around 60%, it was below 50 % among Muslims. Elmasry warned Muslims that if they refrain from voting, "we will end up with anti-hijab laws, and just like in France, will need to ask the police for a permit to pray in our workplace."

CIC President Elmasry explained that thanks to the report he commissioned, Muslims were projecting political power for the first time in Canada's history: "All MPs and their opponents know we are watching them. But don't believe that all deputies who scored well are happy about it. Many resent, for obvious reasons, being associated too closely with Muslims."

These "obvious reasons" were made explicit by Kamel: "The Zionists and corporations run the show in Canada, the Zionist Global Television and the Issi Asper Foundation want to form our minds and the next government."

While the speakers were bent on demonizing the "Zionist" Conservatives and Jewish-owned enterprises, they did not spare the Liberals. Kamel explained that all candidates can commit fatal mistakes, the worst of them all being Zionism:

"I could not vote for a thief. Zionism is theft. A proud Zionist candidate commits a fatal mistake. I'll name some people: Jacques Saada [Montreal liberal deputy and now minister] is a Zionist, he is therefore a thief!"

Kamel also denounced Prime Minister Paul Martin as a "Conservative in Liberal clothing whom the Zionists and the corporations elected as leader of the Liberal Party."

Elmasry was upbeat about the emerging Muslim vote: "With an average age of 37 years, the Muslim population is young and growing twice as fast as the rest of the population. For the first time in Canada's history, Muslims are projecting political power."

The day after the elections, the CIC reported an improbable 88% vote participation among Muslims and congratulated itself on helping defeat the "Zionist" Conservatives.

Imam Elmenyawi was elated: "A Conservative victory would have been disastrous for Muslims. A minority government is a victory for us. We Muslims will wield greater power, especially with regards to foreign policy. There is no better shield from terrorism than Muslim participation in Canadian political life."

Perhaps not surprisingly, none of the organized Muslim community supported the election of Canada's first Muslim woman to Parliament, Yasmin Ratansi, a progressive Muslim from Toronto who does not wear the hijab. (Jerusalem Post Aug 18)

The writer is editor of Judeoscope.ca and writes for Proche-Orient.Info.

Loose Lips Jerusalem Post Editorial

The weekend's headlines were supplied by IDF Chief of General Staff Lt.-Gen. Moshe Ya'alon and Industry and Trade Minister Ehud Olmert. In an interview in Friday's Yediot Ahronot, Ya'alon said that "from the point of view of military needs, we can reach a treaty with Syria and give up the Golan Heights." And during a tour of settlements in Samaria on Thursday, Olmert said that "the four settlements the government intends to evacuate in northern Samaria within the framework of the disengagement plan will not be the only ones. If we find ourselves in a longstanding process, we will evacuate many settlements."

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon reportedly reacted with anger at Olmert's comments. "Where did he get this nonsense?" he said. "We have no intention of getting into such ideas." Ya'alon's words, as of Friday afternoon, had not yet elicited a response.

Sharon's anger will not be enough. Both senior officials should know better than making statements that are above their station and that can potentially undermine Israel's position in future negotiations.

Ya'alon, of course, is only the latest in a long line of generals who have overstepped their duty and commented on issues they should only be speaking about, if at all, in closed forums. That the current prime minister was among the most prominent of them is no excuse. Israel will not come into its own as a democracy as long as senior officers are allowed to act also as freelance politicians and diplomats.

Then too, Ya'alon's comment was not simply a breach of etiquette. Four years have passed since the last serious talks with the Syrians. Since then, Bashar Assad has replaced his father Hafez as president, the Syrian economy and military are in tatters, and the Syrian border has been silent. On the other hand, the continued presence of terrorist headquarters in Damascus, the Syrian control of Lebanon, and its support of the Hizbullah, mean that Syria cannot even be considered as a partner for negotiations.

Israel currently has little to gain from an understanding with the Syrians; even a cold peace, such as we have with Egypt and Jordan, is unthinkable. At a time like this, talking about relinquishing the Golan, with its strategic and historic value, is something that no responsible Israeli leader should do.

Olmert's comments are even more worrying. The minister has been used recently to float trial balloons for Sharon. We hope this isn't another of them. At some point, Israel may have to negotiate the future of its settlements in the West Bank and quite likely evacuate some of them. But the pending evacuation of 7,000 settlers from Gaza is going to be trauma

enough for now, not only for them but for all Israelis, including those of us who support disengagement. Olmert's comments only feed the not-unjustified suspicion of many opponents of disengagement that the plan is a mere prelude to another fraudulent peace process and complete Israeli capitulation.

Sharon must publicly distance himself from these comments and set a precedent deterring other senior officers and ministers from stating opinions without authorization.

Ya'alon is widely considered to be dealing effectively with the current military challenges, especially with the warfare in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip. All the same, he ought to be severely reprimanded. He is coming close to the end of his three-year term as chief of staff. Usually, a fourth year is granted almost as a matter of routine. Sharon should at least consider whether Ya'alon isn't already feeling like a civilian and therefore ought to be honorably discharged.

As for Olmert, he is one of Sharon's closest allies in cabinet. But that doesn't mean that in the upcoming reshuffle, he shouldn't lose one of his current portfolios (either industry and trade or employment and communications). Perhaps that will help him concentrate on his own job, rather than the prime minister's.

In a country continually faced with urgent crises, it is sometimes hard to deal with the merely important ones. But the crisis of Israeli governance may not be able to wait much longer. A prime minister who must routinely contend with insubordinate cabinet members and generals cannot be expected to govern effectively. As they used to say, "Loose lips sink ships." (Jerusalem Post Aug 15)

False Hopes By Jonathan Rosenblum

One of the most striking aspects of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Gaza withdrawal initiative is how little time and energy he has spent explaining and selling his plan to the Israeli public. Both his tactical and strategic thinking remain largely hidden from view. The plan has become something of a tabula rasa upon which supporters across the political spectrum have attached their own explanations and justifications.

Sharon's failure to sell his initiative is no mere detail; it is fundamental to understanding the true meaning of the plan. And what it reveals about the Prime Minister's reading of Israeli society today should concern all of us, whether we support or oppose the Gaza withdrawal.

Above all, the Prime Minister is offering the Israeli public something new - change for change's sake. To those grown weary of the never ending struggle with the Palestinians, to the young and old alike who cannot bear the thought of another fifty years of warfare, the Prime Minister seeks to offer hope for a different sort of future.

Speaking to a meeting of the Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency in June, the Prime Minister stressed this aspect of his initiative: "Above all, it gives the people of Israel hope for a better future. Do not underestimate the power of hope."

And indeed the Prime Minister is correct to worry about the collective psyche of the Jewish people living in Zion. A people without faith and hope in the future is a people whose future is hopeless. That is not a mere tautology, but rather an expression of the crucial role that such intangible factors as national mood play in the affairs of nations.

At the same time, hope for a utopian future cannot be allowed to obscure very real progress. Sharon is reported to have told his cabinet ministers, "I've been on the job for three and a half years, and I haven't done a thing to change the situation." True, he has not made out of the Palestinians a partner for peace. Only the Palestinians can do that. Since the Seder Night Massacre in Netanya two years ago, however, Sharon has significantly reduced the Palestinian terror and done away with the feeling that we are a helpless punching bag, endlessly absorbing blows without the ability to respond.

In addition, Sharon must be given credit for helping the Americans, with varying degrees of clarity, come to view the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a subplot of the larger battle between Islamic fanaticism and the West. The first signs that Palestinians are beginning to look to their own leaders, and not just Israel, as responsible for their suffering also owes in part to Sharon's refusal to dance to Arafat's tune.

Israel has never known peace since its birth, except perhaps for the brief period of euphoria between 1967 and 1973. And the latter period turned out to be a Fool's Paradise. What is different today - indeed for the last decade and a half - is that most Israeli Jews are no longer confident that what is being built justifies the price.

Those doubts give rise to despair. Shinui leader Tommy Lapid captured this mood perfectly when he offered his principal justification for the Gaza withdrawal plan: "Things can't go on this way."

Throughout Jewish history despair has too frequently given rise to messianic fantasies. We have been down this road before. Not just at the time of Shabbetai Tzvi, who followed in the wake of the Chmelnicki pogroms, but as recently as the Oslo Accords, little more than a decade ago. Then too, after the first intifada, the Israeli public was willing, even eager, to try anything, new and hope for the best.

We convinced ourselves that the arch-terrorist Yasir Arafat would become our defender from Palestinian terrorism. And we studiously ignored all the

evidence that Arafat had neither renounced his dream of a Palestine from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean nor prepared his own people to give up that dream.

Then too we armed and trained Palestinian security forces, only to have those forces train their rifles on us during the riots that followed the opening of the Temple Mount tunnel. Under Clause 5 of the Withdrawal Plan, Israel once again undertakes to provide military training to Palestinian security forces, and Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz has announced that Palestinian security forces will once again be allowed to bear arms. Shlomo Miller, the Itamar security guard killed Sunday by a Palestinian policeman, is the first casualty of that new dispensation.

The gaping chasm between the flimsiness of the justifications for the Gaza withdrawal and the enthusiastic hopes pinned on the initiative by the majority of the public suggest that we are reentering a period of messianic delusion.

At the very least, we would expect proponents of the plan to answer one fundamental question: What happens if after the withdrawal, Kassams, or even deadlier missiles, continue to rain down on Israel and the IDF is forced to reoccupy the Gaza Strip. What will we have to show for the withdrawal other than having destroyed nearly twenty thriving and vibrant communities, built from the sand dunes over nearly four decades, and having uprooted nearly 10,000 Jews from their homes.

Nor is the fear of worsening attacks from Gaza merely theoretical. As Evelyn Gordon points out, since the announcement of the Gaza withdrawal plan, terrorist activity from Gaza has spiked. Thirty Kassams landed in Israel in July, as opposed to 6.6 per month over the previous 45 months.

Proponents of the Gaza plan raise very serious concerns. Where they have failed, however, is to show how the plan will solve any of those concerns. On the security front, the most that is claimed for the plan is that the IDF will save the money currently expended defending Gaza Strip settlers and those in isolated West Bank outposts. Prime Minister Sharon has specifically silenced the IDF in cabinet meetings on the grounds that the plan is diplomatic, not security, in nature.

It is theoretically possible that long-range diplomatic understandings with the United States could justify short-term security damage. The evidence mounts, however, that Sharon has received no bankable commitments from the current American administration (and certainly not from any future administration.) The hue and cry raised recently by the United States over 600 new housing units in Maaleh Adumim, a Jerusalem suburb that virtually every Israeli agrees will remain within Israel in any imaginable settlement with the Palestinians, raises serious questions about just what kind of adjustments of the 1949 Armistice Lines the United States has recognized as inevitable.

Tommy Lapid and others rightly worry about Israel becoming a pariah state much like South Africa once was. But he is crazy if he thinks that the Gaza withdrawal will dramatically improve Israel's diplomatic situation. The reasons that Israel is so unfairly singled out for international calumny are many, but they have little to do with the rights and wrongs of the situation.

The European reaction to the initiative has been mostly a yawn followed by calls for a return to the Roadmap. At most, Europe views withdrawal as a first step towards a Palestinian state on all land captured in 1967. One presumes that Prime Minister Sharon has something different in mind.

Others worry about the effect on our collective soul of ruling at gunpoint over a people that hate us. And they are right to do so. But as long as the Palestinians continue to hate us and seek all of our land, the only alternative to doing so is to pull up stakes and depart. Again the withdrawal plan will have achieved nothing on this score, if a barrage of missiles from the Gaza Strip forces the IDF to reoccupy the Strip.

The most often cited reason for the withdrawal is demographic: Within a few years, there will be more Palestinians than Jews between the Jordan and the Mediterranean. That is true. But it will be true regardless of whether Israel withdraws from Gaza or not. Palestinian calls for a one-state solution will not abate just because Israel is no longer in the Gaza Strip. (Nor, incidentally, does withdrawal offer respite from the far greater demographic threat of a hostile Arab minority in Israel constituting 30-40% of the Israeli population within a generation.)

The vast majority of Israelis have long shown a complete willingness to allow the Palestinians complete autonomy to run their own lives, and even to their own state, provided only that state does not become a center for terrorism against Israel. The Palestinians have shown no interest in such a state. Until they do, Israel is left with the unpleasant and soul threatening task of doing what needs to be done to protect its own citizens. Withdrawal from Gaza does nothing to change that calculus.

The Gaza settlers, who will bear the heaviest price of the withdrawal, deserve an answer to the fundamental question: What will be gained if Israel has to eventually reoccupy the Gaza Strip? Until that answer is provided, we are still in the realm of dangerous messianic delusions.

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