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Commentary...

Withdrawal under Fire

By Evelyn Gordon

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's speech to the Herzliya Conference last week was indeed, as this paper's editorial noted on Sunday, something new. But new, unfortunately, is not synonymous with better – and the plan outlined by Sharon last Thursday represents a significant retreat that will encourage Palestinian terror and worsen Israel's international position.

In his speech, Sharon announced that even if the terror continues abated, Israel will withdraw from an unspecified number of settlements in another few months. But in an effort to pretend that this is not a withdrawal under fire – the very move that he was twice elected in a landslide on a pledge to prevent – he said that Israel will compensate for this retreat by "strengthen[ing] its control" over parts of the territories "which will constitute an inseparable part of the State of Israel in any future agreement," and warned that unilateral withdrawal will give the Palestinians "much less than they would have received through direct negotiations." These caveats have been lauded by the Post and other Sharon apologists as a way of ensuring that unilateral withdrawal, far from rewarding Palestinian terror, will actually worsen the Palestinian position. Unfortunately, one need do no more than read the rest of Sharon's speech to realize just how empty and meaningless these caveats are.

Regarding the threat that the Palestinians will receive less through "disengagement" than through negotiations, the speech makes it clear that this is a strictly temporary measure that in no way prevents the Palestinians from obtaining everything they want in the future. The line to which Israel withdraws, Sharon promised, "will not constitute the permanent border of the State of Israel" or "change the political reality between Israel and the Palestinians;" it will also "not prevent the possibility of returning to the implementation of the road map and reaching an agreed settlement."

In short, the unilateral retreat not only grants the Palestinians short-term gains; it simultaneously assures them that they risk no permanent long-term losses.

Aha, say the apologists, but what about the promise to "strengthen Israel's control" over parts of the territories that Israel wants to keep in any future agreement? This pledge, unfortunately, is vitiated by a series of other promises in the very same speech.

First, Sharon pledged that the plan is "a security measure and not a political one," and that any unilateral steps "will be fully coordinated with the United States," which opposes Israeli annexation of any part of the territories. These statements preclude the possibility that Israel will annex certain areas outright.

Israel could still strengthen its hold by substantially increasing the Israeli population of these areas – but Sharon also pledged not to do this. Not only will Israel dismantle all unauthorized settlement outposts, even in these areas, but with regard to authorized settlements, "there will be no construction beyond the existing construction line, no expropriation of land for construction, [and] no special economic incentives." There will also be "no construction of new settlements."

In other words, Israel will do everything in its power to ensure that its hold on these areas is not strengthened: It will not annex them, it will not build new settlements, it will not expand existing ones, it will dismantle unauthorized outposts, and it will not provide incentives to encourage additional people to move there. What Sharon's speech boils down to, therefore, is an unadorned withdrawal under fire, with no compensatory moves whatsoever.

It goes without saying that this will encourage Palestinian terrorism. If three years of terrorist warfare can convince even Sharon – a leading exponent of the perils of rewarding terrorism – to retreat under fire, the Palestinians have every reason to believe that more of the same will produce more withdrawals. That is especially true now that Sharon and the Likud have broken the taboo against such retreats. This move will also eradicate all the gains that Sharon has made over the last three years in convincing the rest of the world that Israel has a right to expect an end to terrorism in exchange for a withdrawal. Now that even Sharon has waived this requirement, why should the rest of the world uphold it?

Indeed, the only lesson the international community can reasonably draw from his retreat is the opposite: that with enough pressure, Israel can be forced to concede even its most cherished red lines without a single Palestinian

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concession in exchange.

This conclusion is almost certain to lead to increased international pressure on Israel for further withdrawals.

Finally, Sharon has almost single-handedly revitalized the Israeli Left. For three years, there has been a virtually wall-to-wall consensus in Israel that the Left's method of unrequited concessions proved itself to be a total failure. That is precisely why Sharon, who twice campaigned on a platform of no concessions without an

end to terrorism, trounced first Ehud Barak and then Amram Mitzna by the largest margins in Israeli history. Yet now, even Sharon is adopting the policy of unrequited concessions. And, as Haaretz columnist Zvi Bar'el aptly noted on Sunday, once one accepts the premise that "in order to increase security, it is necessary to retreat a bit," it becomes difficult to explain why it does not logically follow that "in order to increase security even more, it is necessary to retreat even further" – precisely what the Left has been advocating all along.

Sharon's disengagement plan, though vague on details, appears to envision a much more limited retreat than the massive withdrawal proposed a few weeks ago by Ehud Olmert. Yet the underlying principles differ little – and by virtue of having been advanced by a popular prime minister rather than a fading politician with no political base, the dangers that Sharon's plan poses are infinitely worse. (Jerusalem Post Dec 23)

The 80-20 Fallacy

By Ze'ev B. Begin

Please take a seat in an isolated corner and answer the following questions in a whisper: How many shekels of your capital would you be willing to donate to charity if Yasser Arafat, whether he's relevant or not, were to declare that he recognizes the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security? How many precious moments of your life would you be ready to forgo if he himself were to issue that statement in the name of the Palestine Liberation Organization in an official letter under international auspices?

Have no fear - you won't have to donate a thing, and not because this will never happen, but, on the contrary, because it has already happened.

On September 9, 1993, the chairman of the PLO, Yasser Arafat, wrote an official letter in English to the prime minister of Israel, which contains the following statement: "The PLO recognizes the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security. The PLO accepts United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338." Okay, so he wrote. In the wake of this, Israel's security forces in 1994-1995 left the cities of the Gaza District, Judea and Samaria, with a detailed agreement of 314 pages in English, signed under international auspices and promising Israel quiet, in their pocket. Okay, so it was signed.

People tend not to learn from experience, and since the chronicles of humanity are replete with spectacular examples of people such as Louis Pasteur and Thomas Edison, who tried and failed and tried again until they succeeded, the inventors of Oslo have gone back to their old plan, done a few renovations and are trying again. And indeed, they might succeed. Not in bringing peace, of course, but in bringing about an Israeli withdrawal to the lines of 1949, to the bottom of the hills, because the leaders of the Likud also want to slide down to more or less the same place on the back of Israel's citizens who are desperate, who are ashamed of the people who protect them at danger to their lives, who desire an improvement in the economic situation at long last, who long for a bit of quiet.

The three no's - no to the occupation, no to the settlements, no to targeted assassinations - are not enough. People of action have to paint the reality that will exist after those things disappear. The major element of temptation in the plans being mooted by Meretz, Labor and the Likud is the promise that Israel within the 1949 lines will enjoy tranquillity on the basis of a Jewish majority of 80 percent. However, withdrawal to those lines, with or without an agreement, will not only fail to bring peace with our neighbors: It will also fail to bring quiet within the boundaries of the State of Israel.

The Jews are making it clear that they not only accept the principle of the 1947 partition, but that they now see it as a life jacket: a place that mainly has Jews will belong to the Jews, and if it contains mainly Arabs, it will be taken over by them, and so much for Israel. The Labor Party has already officially ceded the Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem, and some of

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its leaders have already announced their plan to forgo the Arab communities in Wadi Ara. The leaders of the Likud are already ceding the "end neighborhoods" in Jerusalem, and there's more where that came from. However, the racism of the slogan "They'll be there, we'll be here" crosses regions, since "they" constitute about half the residents of Galilee.

The circumstances in which these updated positions were adopted, in the wake of murderous attrition, will have serious implications. After the withdrawal, the winning formula will be applied: additional pressure to get Israel to move to the "internationally legitimate" lines of 1947 in Galilee and to sever from Israel its areas that are heavily populated by Arabs. Since the signing of the Oslo accords, dozens of Israel's Arab citizens have surrendered to the inflammatory arguments of the PLO and Hamas, and have engaged in terrorism. Success is contagious, and an Israeli pullback to the lines of 1949 under the pressure of the brutal terrorism will add persuasive arguments and facilitate the recruitment of more terrorists. No large number of activists is needed in order to bring pressure to bear on Israel in Galilee, even if the majority of the Arab citizens view such activity with chagrin.

Therefore, following a fairly short period of violence in the north of the country, Jews with good intentions are likely to make some creative proposals for the problem of Galilee, such as, in stage one, autonomy for the Arabs there, the evacuation of small and isolated hilltop "lookout communities" and a safe-passage road to Jenin. The line of surrender to terrorism, which led from the emotional and political forgoing of Shiloh to the cession of the Temple Mount, leads also to forgoing Arab population concentrations in Galilee "for the sake of quiet." Because the past decade shows that in the Land of Israel it's the Jews who understand only force and believe only to the fantasies of themselves.

Reality proves anew every day that in order to acquire intelligence and to secure preventive assassination operations that are essential in an effective war against terrorism, there is no substitute in the foreseeable future for the presence of Shin Bet security forces and the Israel Defense Forces in Samaria, Judea and the Gaza District. Therefore, granting sovereignty to the Arab residents there, beyond self-rule, contradicts not only our right to our patrimony, but also the precept of saving lives in Israel.

We have learned that in hard times we must muster great inner resources in order to hold fast. How pitiful and infuriating it is that Israel's leaders are announcing that in the near future, they will have to summon up their inner resources in order to discuss and decide on flight. (Ha'Aretz Dec 19)

Our National Debate By Caroline Glick

The US war on terror hit a new high and a new low this week. The capture of Saddam Hussein was a great victory. It showed that as far as the ousted Iraqi regime is concerned, President Bush is fulfilling the pledge he made on September 20, 2001, that, when it comes to fighting international terrorism, "We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail."

Yet in the days before Saddam's capture, the Bush administration was moving ahead with a policy towards Palestinian terrorists which is the polar opposite of its policies toward Iraq.

Last week, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, Vice President Dick Cheney, and CIA Director George Tenet all reportedly met with Egyptian intelligence chief Gen. Omar Suleiman. During the meetings, Suleiman reportedly demanded that the Bush administration provide guarantees to Palestinian terrorist organizations in exchange for a temporary cessation of terrorist attacks inside Israel's pre-'67 borders. Specifically, he demanded that the US pressure Israel to force IDF redeployment outside areas transferred to the PLO in the Oslo Accords and to end Israeli military action against Palestinian terrorist chiefs, their operatives, and their terrorist infrastructures.

Upon his return to Cairo, Suleiman dispatched his emissaries to Gaza to meet with the commanders of the official PA security services, Fatah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the PFLP, the DFLP, and the Iraqi Baathist Arab Liberation Front. There they told the terror chiefs that Suleiman had received such guarantees from Washington. The meetings convened on Monday, just two days after Hamas held a mass rally in Gaza celebrating the 16th anniversary of its founding. During the rally, Hamas commander Abdel Aziz Rantisi told the crowd of more than 100,000 that his organization would continue its jihad against Israel until the entire country was destroyed.

"Palestine will never be Jewish," he said as he promised a renewal of suicide bombings against Israelis. Over the weekend security forces thwarted yet another attempted suicide bombing in the Dan region – the third such attack thwarted in a 10-day period according to Shin Bet director Avi Dichter.

The Palestinian terror bosses have reportedly rejected the US offer because it was too vague. Speaking to The Jerusalem Post, Islamic Jihad leaders Muhammad al-Hindi and Nafez Azzam said Wednesday that there could be no cessation of attacks until Israel releases all Palestinian prisoners from jail, ceases the construction of the security fence, and redeploys IDF forces to where they were stationed on September 28, 2000 – the day the Palestinians launched their terror war. The terrorists said US guarantees themselves were insufficient because "we don't believe the American promises."

It is not remarkable that the Palestinian terrorists, who routinely burn US flags and effigies of President Bush and call for jihad against the US, would reject ambiguous US guarantees. What is shocking is that the US would deem it proper to make any gesture at all towards these terrorists.

Indeed, the most significant aspect of the latest round of cease-fire talks is that the Egyptians are no longer acting simply as a party to the talks. Rather, in

the aftermath of Suleiman's visit to Washington, they are acting as mediators between the Bush administration and Palestinian terror bosses.

To say that negotiating with terrorists is antithetical to US national security interests would seem to be stating the obvious. Official Palestinian links to Saddam's regime, as well as to al-Qaida and Hizbullah, have been well documented. After the murder of three American personnel in Gaza and the subsequent physical abuse of US investigators at the scene this past October, it should also be self-evident that Palestinian terrorists operating in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza are hostile to the US.

And yet, the fact that Palestinian leaders have lent assistance – both rhetorical and concrete – to the guerrillas fighting coalition forces in Iraq is ignored. PA security boss Jibril Rajoub's call last month for Arabs to join the guerrilla forces in Iraq was barely noted in Washington.

Noticing the fact that Palestinian leaders find common cause with parties presently warring against America would force the administration to admit what it has so far refused to countenance: that the PLO and its Palestinian terror affiliates are openly hostile to the US and share Osama bin Laden's views of America. No doubt this American refusal to contend with Palestinian hostility is a great failure of US national security policy. But the blame cannot be placed solely at Washington's doorstep. The Israeli government has played a critical role in this policy failure.

Not only is our government unable to convince the US of the danger that Palestinian terrorist groups pose to America's national security, it is also unwilling to make the case to Israel that the existence of these forces, harbored and led by the PLO's Palestinian Authority, constitutes an unacceptable national security threat to Israel.

This failure has been made abundantly clear over the past two weeks. When two weeks ago, Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert adopted former Labor Party leader Amram Mitzna's policy of unilateral withdrawal from Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, he effectively said that Palestinian terrorist organizations deserve safe-havens and Israel should surrender ground rather than fight them. Since Olmert's breath-taking display of defeatism, our already superficial national debate has become incomprehensible.

At this week's much touted three-day Herzliya Conference, which presumed to debate the most salient issues impacting Israel's national security, almost no mention was made of the PLO's continued dedication to the violent destruction of Israel.

Not a word was spoken of the implications of Egypt's sponsorship of the Palestinian terror war or Cairo's protective embrace of Palestinian terror organizations. No real discussion was held about the links between Palestinian terrorist networks and international terror networks now actively engaging US forces in Iraq and around the world.

Indeed, the entire vacuous debate seemed to be a tired collection of clichés, all the way down to Sharon's much-touted message Thursday night.

When policy-makers, experts, and pundits talk about the need for reform of the PA, no mention is ever made of the simple fact that every Palestinian political party is a terrorist organization. Every faction represented in the PA's legislature is an armed group.

When discussion is held on the need to reorganize the PA's security services, no one bothers to notice that every single one of these forces is involved in terrorist attacks against Israel. It is as if none of these facts has any bearing on the nature of the war.

Indeed, when Israeli leaders like Olmert proclaim the need for unilateral surrender, when Israel's prime minister declares that in the absence of a Palestinian campaign against terrorism Israel will expel Jews from their homes in order to hand over territory to Palestinian terrorists, they behave as though the Palestinians do not exist and the matter of the war they have been waging against Israel is an internal Israeli affair.

At base, this pathological Israeli political discourse is the direct result of Sharon's declaration in late September 2001 that he supports the establishment of a Palestinian state in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza. Since Sharon made this declaration, the fact that such a state would be the first ever to be spawned directly by a terrorist organization has been conscientiously ignored. Palestinian actions, intentions, and connections to global terrorism were swept under the rug even before the US ousted the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

This all makes sense. If Israelis were to internalize the fact that, as presently constituted, the Palestinian body politic is immersed in terrorist ideology, how could anyone define "progress" as anything other than benchmarks towards the ousting of the PLO and its sister terrorist organizations from positions of power? If our leaders were to actually look at what the Palestinian leadership is doing and listen to what it is saying, they would be forced to reject the expressed policy of the prime minister.

And so it came about that our national debate on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict makes almost no mention of the Palestinians. In the absence of another side, we can talk about the need to "cut ourselves off" from Palestinians without considering whether Palestinian terrorists have any intention of cutting themselves off from Israel.

It is reasonable for the Bush administration to be criticized for its willingness to engage in mediated discussions with Palestinian terror bosses. Such engagements are inimical to US national security interests.

How can the US deter terrorism when it is actively involved in the rapid establishment of a terrorist state? How long will the image of Saddam Hussein's cowardice work to dispel the jihadist belief that the US is a paper

tiger when the US is undermining its own strategic posture by genuflecting to the Palestinian terrorist agenda?

Yet the criticism should first be focused on our own leadership. It is the responsibility of our leaders to wage a war against terrorists who attack Israelis. It is the responsibility of our leaders to pay attention to what our enemies are saying and doing and to point out their actions and plans both to the Israeli people and to our allies in Washington.

Perhaps now that our glitterati have had their chance to shine in Herzliya and Olmert has consumed his 15 minutes, we can clear the decks for a real discussion of the threats to Israel's security. The first item on the agenda should be, "What would Israel's diplomatic policy look like if our government took into account the fact that Palestinian society is infected root and branch by terrorist ideology?" (Jerusalem Post Dec 21)

After the Roadmap By Lenny Ben-David

Palestinians are heading to "prehistoric" times.

Looking back at the ten years of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, there were many historic events that captured the world's hopes and attention: the White House handshake, the Interim Agreement signing in Cairo, the Wye River Accord signed in the White House with the dying King Hussein in attendance, Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian cities, the beginning of joint Palestinian-Israeli security patrols, and the launch of multilateral talks on issues of water, environment, refugees, and economics.

All were indeed historic events; tragically, all were predicated on false Palestinian promises, Arafatian tricks, and American and Israeli delusions. I attended the Cairo signing in May 1994 and was one of the many incredulous observers when Yasser Arafat "forgot" to sign one of the agreements. We witnessed Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak explode and demand that Arafat sign it, adding to his demand, "Ya kalb!" ("You dog!").

When Arafat rode into Gaza from Egypt for the first time in July 1994 — another great "moment" in modern history — Israeli intelligence officers noted how low the car was riding and how high up in the seat Arafat was sitting. Crammed into the Mercedes with (and under) Arafat were contraband weapons and terrorist operatives who were banned from entering the Palestinian territories. Israeli security sources also believe Arafat smuggled weaponry in his private jet after the Gaza airport opened with much media hoopla.

When Arafat accepted President Clinton's invitation to the Camp David negotiations in 2000, none of the American or Israeli negotiators anticipated him throwing agreement-busting demands of the right of Palestinian refugees' return to Israel and Israel's total surrender of Judaism's holiest sites in Jerusalem. Clinton was flabbergasted when Arafat denied that Jewish temples ever existed in Jerusalem.

In 1999, while serving as an Israeli diplomat in Washington, I was challenged publicly by a senior U.S. State Department official who rejected my charge that the Palestinian Authority was releasing Palestinian terrorists and murderers from jail. Subsequently, the world learned that the PA was not only releasing them but, in some cases, and under Arafat's orders, actually funding them and their terrorist organizations.

The photogenic joint-security patrols ended when Palestinian soldiers turned their guns on their Israeli patrol partners. The multilateral talks collapsed when Palestinians refused to attend. And Israel's withdrawals from Palestinian cities were reversed when the Israeli army was forced to reenter those areas to destroy terrorist bases and bomb factories.

Yasser Arafat has spoiled, poisoned, corrupted, and undermined every peace proposal presented over the last decade. Every envoy tasked with advancing the Palestinian-Israeli peace process in recent years — George Mitchell, Anthony Zinni, and most recently John Wolf — have all returned home empty-handed. No wonder the late King Hussein of Jordan said of Arafat, "He never came to a bridge he didn't double-cross."

A sober and realistic look at the state of Palestinian-Israeli relations leads to the conclusion that perhaps it is time to return to "prehistoric" days, a time prior to the exciting photo-ops and masturbatory diplomacy (the feel-good, unproductive, and errant attempts at peacemaking).

What is "prehistoric" Palestine? Who ruled the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza prior to the Oslo Accords and Arafat, and under what conditions?

Israel. From the 1967 Six Day War until Arafat's arrival in 1994, Israel's Civil Administration ran the Palestinian territories. Attached to the Israeli defense ministry, the Civil Administration strove to turn much of the daily functioning of life in the Palestinian territories over to Palestinian civil servants. "Autonomy" was the goal, first suggested by Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin in 1978. Officials from Israel's ministries worked with their Palestinian counterparts, so that educational or agricultural experts from Israeli ministries assisted their colleagues. Palestinian doctors and nurses attended ulpan to learn Hebrew so that they could take advanced courses in Israeli hospitals. Palestinian sick frequented Israeli hospitals at the Civil Administration's expense.

That relationship will never return. As enlightened as Israel's administration was, it was viewed by the Palestinians as occupation. Moreover, in light of three years of warfare, Israel's level of trust of the Palestinians is in overdraft, making such close Israeli-Palestinian cooperation a thing of the past. Israel's economy, devastated by three years of war and the flight of investors and tourists, will not take on the financial burden of administering to the Palestinians again. International largesse, which has kept Palestinian society afloat and Arafat's pockets filled, will not be offered to Israel for aiding the Palestinians.

Still, as long as Arafat runs his mafia state, Israel's army will remain on guard around Arab towns but will allow international aid to the Palestinians. \ **Jordan and Egypt.** Between 1949 and 1967, Egypt controlled Gaza with an iron fist, and Jordan administered the West Bank, an area that it had annexed illegally in 1951. Palestinian nationalism was still in its infancy, and both territories were run like backward satrapies.

Egypt and Jordan have much to offer as an alternative to Arafat and to Israel's administration of the territories. They both have peace treaties with Israel (although Egypt's behavior borders on belligerence). They both have established and relatively uncorrupt civil servants who could assist the Palestinians in establishing a functioning government. Both countries know Arafat all too well, and they know how to quell terrorism: ruthlessly. Not only do they speak Arabic, but they share with the Palestinians a religion, a way of life, and a way of thinking that Israelis will never fully comprehend. Jordanian and Egyptian police could help restore order on Palestinian streets where local gangs and chaos now rule.

It is unlikely that Palestinians would welcome with open arms a return to "prehistoric" times under Jordanian and Egyptian rule. Jordan's Hashemite troops reportedly killed as many as 20,000 Palestinians during Arafat's attempted Black September coup in 1970. Nevertheless, perhaps the Palestinians would accept their "brethren" if their presence were temporary and if it was the only alternative for moving the Israeli army (and Arafat's thugs) out.

Britain. Palestine — Jewish and Arab — was controlled by the British between 1917 and 1948, and both Arabs and Jews made life hell for the Brits. Instead of the British, however, there has been recent discussion of bringing in international troops — from NATO or the United Nations — to serve as an international intervention force or a buffer between Israel and the Palestinians. Another version would establish a trusteeship, led by the United States, for the Palestinian territories.

Forget about it. International forces are anathema to Israel. Considering how the United Nations routinely gangs up on Israel and how worthless U.N. troops have been in keeping PLO and Hezbollah terrorists away from Israel's northern border, Israel will never accept such a force. For the Palestinians, such a force and/or trusteeship would be seen as one occupier replacing another. An international force would also be a lightningrod for all of the jihadist factions attacking the Western presence across the Middle East.

One more alternative remains: for the Palestinian people to rule themselves. It is a long shot, and it could be achieved only if Arafat were somehow removed from the picture, along with the hundreds of PLO thugs and apparatchiks he brought with him from Tunisia and the thousands of soldiers from Palestine Liberation Army contingents based in Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Jordan, Algeria, and Iraq. They are all from the Palestinians' prehistoric times. They are the flesh-eating dinosaurs who know only the methods of terror and who feed on the flesh of innocents, including that of their own people.

A native Palestinian society that experienced life next-door to Israel may still exist, a society of bourgeois businessmen, educators trained in Western schools, journalists who published uncensored newspapers using Israeli presses, and the simple construction workers and fruit pickers who brought home from Israel a daily wage. They could perhaps one day propel themselves into better times — back to the future. They have extensive international assistance, and they are probably better-positioned and -educated than the Iraqi people to build a semi-democratic society. But unlike the Iraqi people, their progress is blocked by a despot.

The writer, a former Israeli diplomat in Washington, is an international consultant. (National Review Dec 22)

Reading Sharon's Mind By Daniel Pipes

In a much-noted speech last week, Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ostensibly made a dramatic reversal in course. But I am wondering whether to take his shift at face value.

Mr. Sharon announced that the "road map," a U.S. plan that envisions Israel and the Palestinians negotiating a settlement between them, has only a "few months" left to live. If "the Palestinians still continue to disregard their part in implementing the road map," he warned, "Israel will initiate the unilateral security step of disengagement from the Palestinians."

This "Disengagement Plan," he explained, will include "the redeployment of [Israeli] forces along new security lines and a change in the deployment of settlements" to reduce the number of Israelis living among Palestinians. Security will be provided by "[Israel Defense Forces] deployment, the security fence, and other physical obstacles."

Perhaps the most startling element of this speech — because it is most at odds with Mr. Sharon's long-time views — was this statement about the Israeli civilians living in the West Bank and Gaza: "There will be no construction beyond the existing construction line, no expropriation of land for construction, no special economic incentives and no construction of new settlements."

Though presented in a take-charge, active, and even somewhat bellicose manner, the Disengagement Plan sent three defeatist messages:

* Palestinian terrorism works. Even as violence and attempted violence against Israelis continues (24 suicide attacks have been thwarted just since

October 4, 2003), it grants several key Palestinian demands: more land under Palestinian Authority control, removal of roadblocks in place to protect Israeli lives, and dismantling some Jewish habitations in the West Bank and Gaza. Mr. Sharon appears to be hoping that concessions will appease the beast.

* Israel is in retreat. Mr. Sharon presented his plan as an ultimatum to the Palestinians, but, however aggressively wrapped, its substance constitutes a capitulation. In the words of Ziad Abu Amr, a Palestinian academic and politician, as radical Palestinians watch the debate in Israel unfold and note concessions being offered, "they don't think of it as a favor from Sharon's government, they see it as an outcome of their struggle."

* Israelis are fearful. Passive obstacles — walls, road blocks, demilitarized zones, and the like — have the tactical utility of reducing casualties and defining territory. But they are useless on the strategic level; they cannot solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. No fence, however high, however deeply dug, however electrified and monitored, can win a war. To the contrary, building a wall implies cowering behind it, hoping the enemy will not strike. And cowering signals to the Palestinians that they enjoy the initiative and that Israel has gone into a defensive mode.

Taken at face value, then, the Sharon speech amounts to a major blunder; were its defeatist policies put into effect, they would spur Palestinians to engage in more violence, and so delay a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

But that's taking this speech at face value. Count this observer as skeptical that Mr. Sharon actually means what he says, for it too starkly contradicts his known views, for example, on the need for Israelis to control the West Bank. (In 1998, as foreign minister, he urged Israelis there to "grab more hills, expand the territory. Everything that's grabbed, will be in our hands. Everything we don't grab will be in their hands.") Last week's speech appears to reflect momentary imperatives, not long-term goals.

This reflects the fact that as prime minister, Mr. Sharon has two different audiences. Palestinians he wants to convince that violence against Israelis is counterproductive, and this he achieves by retaliating hard against terrorism. The Israeli public and President Bush he wants to stay on good terms with by demonstrably engaging in diplomacy.

Maintaining these two more-or-less contradictory policies at the same time has not been easy; Mr. Sharon has done so through a virtuoso performance of quietly tough actions mixed with voluble concessions.

I don't pretend to know what is on the prime minister's mind — he does not confide in me — but I do suspect that his speech last week amounted to yet another such concession, this time addressed to an Israeli public demanding something more activist and immediate than the achingly long-term policy of deterrence. Mr. Sharon, a shrewd politician who knows when he must bend, has outlined a plan that I believe he has little wish to fulfill. (New York Sun Dec 23)

Newsmaker: View from the Left By Melissa Radler

"It is an open secret within the European Parliament and the European Commission that EU aid to the Palestinian Authority has not been spent correctly," Ilka Schroeder said during a recent address in New York.

The parliament, in which she has served in since 1999, "does not intend to verify whether European taxpayers' money could have been used to finance anti-Semitic murderous attacks. Unfortunately, this fits well with European policy in this area."

Nearly a year ago, Schroeder, 25, a German Green who began her political career protesting the war in Kosovo and denouncing globalization, set her sights on an issue long shunned by radical Left: the diverting of some of the 250 million in annual aid for the Palestinian people to corrupt officials and terrorist groups bent on Israel's destruction.

Faced with strident opposition from her fellow anti-racism activists, whom she derides as "simple-minded anti-Semites," and EU External Relations Commissioner Chris Patten, whom she has accused of "winking approval of terrorist attacks funded by the EU," Schroeder, along with French parliamentarian Francois Zimeray, nonetheless managed to initiate an inquiry by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) into the issue. OLAF's most current public statement on the matter was a mid-November denial that European funds have financed Yasser Arafat's Al-Aksa Martyrs Brigades.

For Schroeder, the funding issue points to a larger problem: Europe's misuse of the Middle East conflict to challenge US hegemony.

"The primary goal of the EU is the internationalization of the conflict in order to underline the need for its own mediating role," she argues, warning that renewed European calls for a multinational force in the region - heard most recently by the head of the largest political bloc in the parliament - combined with heightened levels of anti-Semitism in Europe and the Arab world, could spell disaster for Jews everywhere.

"The Palestinians are playing the ugly role of being the cannon fodder for Europe's hidden war against the US," she adds.

While Schroeder's call for accountability in EU funding was supported by nearly one quarter of the 626-member parliament, she appears grimly convinced that her efforts to expose anti-Zionism, which she sees as Europe's polite version of anti-Semitism, have come to naught. Embraced by Jewish groups in Europe and the US, Schroeder is now visiting Israel for the first time for further inquiry into her continent's role in the region.

"There is no difference in the consciousness of an average member of the European Parliament and an average German peace demonstrator, and I consider this to be a mixture of naivete, moralism, anti-Americanism, anti-Semitism, and

anti-Zionism and an altogether serious danger," she said during her US speaking tour. "It is against these trends that my efforts are directed."

Why is Palestine such a popular cause in Europe?

The Palestinian cause is popular because Palestinians are seen by most of the left-wing as the classical victims of imperial world interests. Also, it fits in well with anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist ideology, whereby you can easily criticize Israel for everything it does militarily. Especially for Germans, it's important to see that Germany is not trying to get rid of its history but to instrumentalize the Shoah. That Israel exists is still kind of an outcome of the Shoah; it's still something that reminds the world of what Germany did. In picturing Israelis and Jews as the perpetrators - it's very popular to hear in Europe, the Israelis have learned nothing, they behave like the Nazis - it's an export of history. It's the old anti-Semitism expressed in different ways.

How was your role in initiating the OLAF inquiry greeted by the Left?

They thought I was absolutely crazy and they couldn't understand why anybody would stand up for Israel. It has been hardest to make my point among the Left because they are the most into anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. For me it's disappointing, because I believe the more left-wing people are, the more they should be interested in some kind of liberation and emancipation. For me, the vast majority in Palestine is very much against those aims and is very much regressive. I can't understand why [the Left] is blind to this, and why they are so blind to the history of Israel and the Jews and anti-Semitism.

Since the Holocaust, Germany has been a friend to Israel in the international arena. Do you see support for Israel starting to erode?

The conservatives have been friendlier, but they had a different calculation. They wanted to gain a more powerful Germany, but they wanted to do it through good relations with the US. Their friendship with Israel is more strategic, and this relative support is gone.

In Germany, people have had to hide it [anti-Israel sentiment] a bit. Now people are coming out and saying, I'm the taboo breaker, but there was never any taboo. Germans just say this to make themselves feel like they're the victims of some kind of Jewish censorship.

It seems that some things never change.

No, and they're getting worse. This is what I see happening in the long term in Germany. Of course in Europe, France and Belgium are much worse when it comes to Israel, but Germany is not a real friend of Israel.

What do you think of the post-Oslo peace initiatives: the road map, Geneva Accord, etc.?

In the road map and the Quartet, you can see the rising influence of Europe, and also of Germany, and the push to establish itself as the neutral mediator in the conflict. The road map was a real success for the Europeans and the Palestinians, and having analyzed the role of Europe, I can say this is a real danger for Israel.

The parties are not lacking a plan [for peace]; I think there is just no plan for people living in the Palestinian territories being incited by anti-Semitism, then wanting to found their own state. As long as so many countries support the Palestinian cause being so anti-Semitic and so directed against Israel, and the international scene is shifting against Israel more and more, we have a problem. Of course, I should tell you this should all change, anti-Semitism should stop, Israel should have its security, but I just don't see that happening. If anti-Semitism could exist after the Shoah, it's clear it's not going to go away tomorrow.

Why do Europeans seem unable to make the connection between terror in Israel and terror on their own soil?

Europe has much better relations with countries also with strong Islamist forces, so they don't see it as much as a threat as the US does. Of course, if you see the comparison between how they treated radical Kurdish organizations that were more worker orientated, when terrorism really hit them hard they sent people back to Turkey even though it was clear they'd be jailed, tortured, or worse.

The terror against Israel must also be seen in the context that Europeans don't want to see the Jews and Israelis as victims. After one of the suicide bombings in Israel, [EU Commissioner Chris] Patten once said, "I'm sorry for the families of the victims of the suicide bombings, as much as I'm sorry for the Palestinians who lost their members of families." He also says the bombings must be seen in the context of the Middle East, and then he points to Israeli actions...

On September 11, Europeans saw it as an attack against Western civilization, but very quickly, within a few weeks, it shifted into some kind of joy that the unchallenged world power was finally hit. Maybe in the Left there is a standard argument that of course it wasn't nice, but then there was this "but," and the "but" was that it was the US's fault. In other words, what should people do besides blow themselves up.

How did the United States come to be so reviled by Europe?

Anti-Americanism is nothing new; it's an old story, but now it's heated up. [US President George W.] Bush is a person who can be used more easily for proving anti-American stereotypes, but still I would say it doesn't depend on what the American government does. It's the same with anti-Semitism. It doesn't depend on the action of Jews; it's there and it won't disappear if you take another policy. (Jerusalem Post Dec 22)