

October 6, 2005

FLIGHT OF FANCY

The load of misery which Ariel Sharon inflicted on the Jews of Gush Katif has affected the nerves, the hearts and the minds of myriads (conceivably a majority) of the Jews in Israel. In the tragedy of the expulsion an effective supporting role was played by most of the Hebrew media.

Shockingly, neither they nor our hyper-activist judiciary found it morally unacceptable to use the army to implement it. Here were young men and women who thought when they enlisted that they were being trained to fight a putative enemy, found themselves doing the noxious work of forcibly driving innocent fellow Jews from their homes. The obscene task imposed on these youngsters will not leave them unscarred. In destroying a Jewish community, Sharon thus diminished the image of Israel's army, but on the way to his Gaza abandonment he also encompassed a mighty side sweep at Israel's parliamentary democracy.

Sharon was elected prime minister precisely on the strength of his undertaking not to do what his opponent, Amram Mitzna, aimed to do. When he revealed to his Likud party that his game-plan was to hijack Mitzna's policy, a majority in the party rejected it overwhelmingly. Instead of accepting its verdict, and either retracting or resigning, he then makes a compact with the only too willing Labor minority.

Supported by part of the Likud Knesset members, he cobbles together a different majority in the Knesset to carry out the policy of the minority. In the course of these maneuvers he rejects the idea of a national referendum - manifestly from fear of a second defeat - and goes ahead with his plan.

To add insult to the injury of their expulsion, the Jews of Gush Katif are then subjected to a tongue-lashing by Sharonist politicians and assorted journalists. It is their duty, they are told, to obey the orders of a 'democratically elected' government. In short, everything connected with Sharon's project - conceived in sin, most dangerous to Israel's future, yet technically legal - was rotten to the core, and continues to stink to high heaven.

BUT NOW it is the day after; and Israel is faced with the far-reaching effects of Sharon's manipulations. Their first fruits, in public relations, have been wondrous to behold.

Suddenly 'everybody' loves Israel. All the friends of our enemies, all those who have been cursing us over the years, all those who have been urging on our would-be killers, all those who have been demonizing our nation, are now hailing the hero Sharon. Together with them, indeed well to the forefront, have rushed the left-wing and other defeatist Israelis. Their dearest wishes, their fondest dreams - of Israeli retreats, of Jewish 'settlers' crushed - are being realized. For they are certain that Gaza was only a beginning, and that Sharon deliberately dragged in the abandonment of north Samarian villages so as to provide a sampling of what is yet to come.

Indeed the friendly tailwind generated by Operation Gaza has already added momentum to the international pressure on Sharon. The US secretary of state hastened to declare that 'Gaza only' is not enough, and that she expects further territorial concessions that would lead to an independent Palestinian state. French President Chirac chimes in

with a specific demand: he wants more arms to be given to Mahmoud Abbas. As for UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, even the 'Road Map' seems no longer to interest him. He merely wants the 'West Bank' to go the way of Gaza.

They all seem to have forgotten the clause in the 'Road Map' diktat to Israel, which at least requires Arab disarmament before Israel helps to establish the Palestinian state. They also persist in ignoring Abbas's repeated assurances to his people that he does not intend starting a civil war - which would follow any attempt to confiscate arms from anybody.

Meanwhile Hamas and Islamic Jihad are taking advantage of the hudna to prepare the next offensive against Israel. Joyously breaking down the wall between Gaza and Egypt, thousands of Arabs have infiltrated in both directions and a considerable quantity of arms has been smuggled unhindered into Gaza.

As for their systemic conduct of the war, however, they will undoubtedly be expanding the two operations which Israeli ingenuity has so far been unable to overcome: importation of arms by way of the tunnels dug under Egypt's nose, and the dispatch of rockets - whose launching pads can now be advanced within Gaza, so as to bring some 40 additional Israeli targets beyond Sderot into range.

They keep reminding the world that their Gaza victory has brought their aim closer to - not a Palestinian state, but the 'liberation of all the lands between Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea.'

To any long-term observer of the Arab scene - through 1948 with the Arab League's war they then launched to abort the birth of the Jewish state; through 1967 when, with Judea, Samaria, Gaza and the Golan in Arab hands, president Nasser of Egypt in 1967 proclaimed the war of annihilation on Israel - and all that has followed - it is obvious that not only Hamas sees the great retreat under terror from Gaza, its political implications and its psychological significance, as a great step forward towards that deadly purpose.

TO HEIGHTEN their euphoria, Arabs need only read the words recently spoken by the Vice Prime Minister of Israel, Ehud Olmert. On June 8, shortly before the Gush Katif operation, he was addressing a meeting in New York of the 'Israel Policy Forum,' a noted left-wing organization.

He expressed his great joy at having been invited (for the first time), being so warmly welcomed and at the fact that Sharon, for whom they 'had not had much love in the past,' had sent them a special letter. He spoke of the new 'process' that will bring more 'security, prosperity and joy to everybody living in the Middle East'!

He went on to explain: 'We all desperately need it. We are tired of fighting, we are tired of being courageous, we are tired of winning, we are tired of defeating our enemies, we want that we will be able to live in an entirely different environment of relations with our enemies. We want them to be our friends, our partners, our good neighbors, and I believe that this is not impossible.'

What greater encouragement could there be for an enemy? This surprising rationale emphasizes how essential it is for Israel's future that Sharon and the various Olmerts who surround him must be given their freedom from office. Following the Gaza retreat, a crucial phase of the war is being thrust on Israel, and the Arab war effort is growing in intensity.

The leaders of Israel must do some deep rethinking. A nation cannot fight wars against an enemy aiming at its destruction while its leaders are occupied with fatuous flights of fancy about peace and formulae for negotiations. That is the lesson we should have learned from bitter experience time after time since 1948.

Negotiations must wait until the war is won.