

January 3, 2003

## **SHARON'S EGREGIOUS BLUNDER**

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's recent exposition of his policy, which envisages the end of Arab terror and a reformed Palestinian Authority, will probably be blown away by continued terror and, despite rumblings in the Arab community, continued failure to institute genuine reforms.

What will not be blown away is his promise of a Palestinian state which, by its very utterance, signals a historic victory for the Arabs.

The fact that Sharon did not first discuss the idea with his cabinet colleagues, nor submit it to his own party's parliamentary representatives before telling the public, will not affect the unavoidable assumption, eager or reluctant, throughout the world, that Israel has at last succumbed to the Palestinian demand for a state.

The impact of Sharon's declaration, and its pointed repetitions, has not been dulled by the efforts of some of the Likud faithful to soften the blow. He meant, they say, 'under certain conditions' or 'only after broad reforms.' Sharon himself has spoken of a state 'with strict limitations.' Most weighty of the envisaged limitations is, of course, that the Palestinian state would be demilitarized. This notion is the purest nonsense.

If Israel were to reach the nadir of political inanity of actually helping to establish a state for the Palestinian Arabs, the Arabs would reject with all vigor the idea that their state would be hobbled by a denial of major armaments. No less emphatic would be the hostile reaction of a large segment of the European and other nations.

Even friends, appalled and distressed, would find themselves bound, albeit reluctantly, to deplore such a limitation of sovereignty. They would find it intolerable.

For the Arabs the military issue is doubly critical. First because the very idea of demilitarization would be regarded as a blow to their honor; second, because a sovereign state has never been the ultimate purpose of Arab policy. The purpose is the destruction of Israel. A state could represent only the penultimate 'phase' in the policy of phases. It could be the staging ground - with a large and variegated arsenal - for the 'final phase.'

That is the original Arab game plan.

The Arabs made their purpose clear from the very beginning of Israel's existence. In the UN debate on Palestine in November 1947 which led to the partition plan, Jamal Husseini, the spokesman of the Arab League States (there was no entity called Palestinians) announced that the Arabs would not tolerate the existence of a Jewish state in Palestine. The UN partition plan actually also offered them a state. They brushed the offer aside, rejected the plan, and on the morrow of the British government's departure

from Palestine, the Arab states launched their war for the annihilation of the infant Jewish state.

Nineteen years later, when the Arab leaders calculated again that they could win, they launched what became the Six Day War. The leader of the Arab coalition, president Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, confidently, repeatedly and vociferously announced its aim. 'The liquidation of Israel' he declared 'will be liquidation through violence. We shall enter a Palestine not covered with sand, but soaked in blood.' This is pounded out every Friday in the mosques. It is part of textbooks in the Arab schools and is the highlight of political speeches in the Muslim world.

If the Arab objective is achieved, the sovereign state of Palestine could join the Arab League. There, a pact for mutual security exists. Any Arab state attacked may call on the other members of the League to come to its assistance. A ready-made casus belli exists: The Arabs have long laid it down that the very existence of Zionism is an 'aggression.'

AS FOR Sharon's commitment to lay down limiting conditions for a state, he should not be taken too seriously - in particular, on the subject of demilitarization, which has very seldom succeeded anywhere. He will not stand up to the international condemnation which will pour down on his head, to the accompaniment undoubtedly of more anti-Jewish violence. For what he is doing now - threatening with dismissal ministers who refuse to betray their trust together with him - and for his projected betrayal of that trust, there is a precedent in Israeli history.

When prime minister Menachem Begin decided to hand over Sinai to Egypt in 1977, he promised the residents of Yamit and the Sinai villages that on no account would they have to leave when (under the prospective peace treaty) the Egyptians took over. He visited Sinai personally and declared that, if in the forthcoming negotiations the demand would be made for dismantling the settlements he, Begin, 'would pack his bags' and go home.

He went on to Camp David. There he was indeed faced with Egyptian president Anwar Sadat's demand that the Jews living in Sinai must be evacuated. But he did not pack his bags, and the settlers were driven by force from their homes. Begin, of course, took responsibility, but he first telephoned Jerusalem to consult one of his ministers - who promptly expressed his approval. That minister was Ariel Sharon.

In the subsequent vote in the Knesset on the agreement with Egypt, only a portion of Begin's own party supported him, but enough members of the Labor opposition gave their votes to ensure his majority. Now, a quarter of a century later, one can almost hear Sharon's mind ticking away in the same direction. If the Likud ministers, Tzahi Hanegbi and his colleagues 'let him down,' he can depend on ultra-defeatist Labor leader Amram Mitzna to help him out.

If Hanegbi, Uzi Landau, Limor Livnat and their colleagues in the government follow the national interest, uphold the political truth and respect the moral values with which they

were brought up, they should be prepared to do everything in their power to undo Sharon's egregious blunder.