

A Path to Peace: Sharon's Disengagement Plan or the Geneva Accord?

By Menachem Klein

On May 7, 2004 Menachem Klein, noted Israeli author, professor of Political Science at Bar Ilan University, Advisor to Israel's delegation to the Camp David summit in 2000, and a member of the Israeli team that negotiated the Geneva Accord, spoke in Washington at the Carnegie Endowment under the sponsorship of the Foundation for Middle East Peace and Americans for Peace Now. Following is an edited version of Dr. Klein's remarks, which were also delivered at Beth Emet, The Free Synagogue in Evanston, IL, on behalf of Chicago Peace Now, Brit Tzedek v'Shalom and the Labor Zionist Alliance.

The Geneva Accord is Sharon's nightmare. On the eve of the Likud referendum on Sharon's disengagement plan, he threatened that if it failed, Geneva was the alternative. Sharon is so worried about Geneva (or similar initiatives like the Nusseibeh-Ayalon plan) that he insisted that President Bush include the following sentence in the letter the President gave Sharon during their meeting in Washington in late April: "The United States will do its utmost to prevent any attempt by anyone to impose any other plan...than my own vision and its implementation, as described in the road map." To explain why Sharon is so worried about Geneva, I will compare it to Sharon's plan.

Sharon's commitment to evacuate the settlements in Gaza is a smokescreen. Pulling out of 17 settlements in Gaza will not end the occupation of Gaza Strip. Under Sharon's plan, Israel will maintain Israeli control over Gaza's airspace, its territorial waters, and all border crossings. It also envisages that the Israeli army and security services will continue to have a free hand to operate there. Gaza thus will remain a vast prison under the external control of the IDF, which will retain the right to intervene.

Sharon's decision to implement his plan unilaterally is also problematic. By avoiding negotiations with the Palestinians for evacuating the Gaza settlements, Israel receives no

quid quo pro toward peace. In contrast, the Geneva Accord offers Israel security arrangements, an end to claims, and an end to the conflict in exchange for withdrawal from the settlements.

Moreover, and this is my main argument, by focusing the debate on evacuating Gaza Strip settlements, Sharon aims to disguise his strategic goal of consolidating Israel's control over the West Bank. He is willing to sacrifice the civilian settlements in Gaza to accomplish this.

Sharon's plan for the West Bank is defined by three aspects of the "separation barrier" system that Israel is building unilaterally along a route approved by the Israeli cabinet in June 2002 and October 2003. These are the territory the barrier will surround; the territory that will remain on the Israeli side of the barrier; and the settlements that, according to Sharon's vision and his public commitments, should be retained.

The separation barrier will be 686 kilometers long, including the route it will take around the settlement of Ariel, whereas the pre-1967 war "green line" border was only about 350 kilometers. The border defined by the barrier will be extended to about 786 kilometers, assuming that Sharon implements his plan to extend it so that it will place the settlements of Maale Adumim east of Jerusalem and Kiryat Arba near Hebron on the Israeli side.

Sharon's military planners have also drawn a line for the separation barrier in the Jordan valley to the east that is 143 kilometers long, although a Sharon spokesman has said the eastern wall will not be built for the time being. Nevertheless, Sharon has always said Israel will retain the Jordan Valley up to a line about 10 kilometers west of the Jordan River. Sharon's policy of staying in the Jordan Valley is confirmed by the location of both "legal" settlements that he will retain and "illegal outposts" that are being built along in the Jordan valley. There are 37 such outposts in this area whose purpose is to thicken the large established settlements in that area overlooking the Jordan Valley. The fact that the Government is offering houses in established settlements in the Jordan

Valley to new Israeli buyers is further evidence of Sharon's intention to preserve this area, de facto, as part of Israel.

The Israeli State Comptroller reported that the Minister of Housing has spent \$6.5 million dollars in illegal settlement construction during the past three years. Half of this has supported illegal outposts, notwithstanding the fact that that President Bush's Road Map calls for the dismantling of all outposts and Sharon has promised to do so. The IDF, the World Zionist Organization, the Jewish Agency, the Ministry of Infrastructure, and Prime Minister Sharon himself have been complicit in this absurdity.

If Sharon only builds the separation barrier in the west, Israel will annex, de facto, about 20% of the West Bank, once the barrier is extended to include Ariel and Ma'aleh Adumim, as is likely. The areas Sharon plans to retain under his plan are very similar to those on the map that Israel proposed to the Palestinians at the opening of the Camp David summit in 2000 (although these percentages improved by the end of the summit, improving further still at Taba). If he extends the barrier to the Jordan Valley, or even if he does not but fulfills his commitment to control the Jordan Valley without a barrier, Sharon will have annexed, de facto, about 45% of the West Bank. .

It is clear that the line of the separation barrier in the west and the virtual barrier in the east, even if an actual barrier is not built there, is not based solely on security considerations. It is primarily designed to preserve the majority of the settlements and to divide, contain, and control the Palestinian populated areas.

Now let me compare the Geneva Accord to Sharon's plan. First, if we assume that Sharon intends to annex only 20% of the West Bank, this compares to only 2% that would be annexed under the Geneva Accord. This 2% would include the areas in which 50 percent of the settlers reside.

Under the Geneva Accord, no Palestinians will be annexed to Israel and no settlers will remain on the Palestinian side of the border. In comparison, under Sharon's plan,

375,000 West Bank Palestinians will remain on the Israeli side of the barrier. 200,000 of these are Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem. 50,000 live just outside of the boundaries of East Jerusalem. The other 125,000 live elsewhere in the rest of the West Bank, west of the separation barrier. They will be caught between the June 4, 1967 international border line and the fence that cuts them off from their hinterland.

In addition, under Sharon's plan, 200,000 more West Bank Palestinians, mostly in poor rural areas, will be confined in enclaves. Sharon's plan will evacuate only four small, half empty and very remote settlements in the northern West Bank. The plan would preserve the 58 other Israeli settlements in the heart of the West Bank on the Palestinian side of the separation barrier. In order to protect these 58 settlements, Israel will contain and control the Palestinians through a combination of electronic sensors, road blocks and checkpoints that will create additional barriers within the external separation barrier.

The 58 authorized settlements, to which one may add about 80 'illegal' outposts, contain about 70,000 settlers. They will have 700 kilometers of roads for their and the IDF's exclusive use.

It is clear from this data that Sharon has no intention of disengaging from the West Bank. Sharon's deputy Ehud Olmert recommended a much greater pull back from the West Bank that would evacuate 40,000 – 44,000 settlers to Israel. Sharon rejected this because he is still committed, psychologically and ideologically and for political and security reasons to Israel's settlement project, the largest undertaking Israel has made since the 1967 war. The massive scale of the settlement enterprise created under Sharon's leadership in his former ministerial posts and today as Prime Minister speaks for itself. I doubt that Sharon is capable of crossing the Rubicon and reversing it.

Sharon's separation barrier will incorporate into Israel 154,000 settlers in the five main settlement blocks that Sharon has vowed to preserve. Under the Geneva Accord, only 110,000 West Bank settlers, or 50% of the total, would be annexed to Israel, and no Israeli settlements would remain on the Palestinian side of the border. The difference

between Sharon's plan and Geneva is 44,000 settlers, which is not great. But the difference between the 20% of Palestinian territory to be annexed under Sharon's plan (not counting the Jordan Valley) vs. 2% of Palestinian territory to be annexed under Geneva is huge. The difference lies in Sharon's strategy to annex the maximum land area of Biblical Israel and the maximum number of settlements. To accomplish this, he is willing to accept the inevitable de-facto annexation of many Palestinians. In contrast, the Geneva Accord favors withdrawing from far more land and settlements in order to end the occupation of Palestinians.

Withdrawing unilaterally from the Gaza settlements raises the risk that Gaza will be controlled by a coalition of radical Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and radical Fatah factions. Overall, it is very much in Israel's interest to achieve a final status agreement with the Palestinians, and this can only be achieved through negotiations. Sharon justifies acting unilaterally by claiming there is no partner with whom to negotiate in the current Palestinian leadership. Others, like Ehud Barak, go further, arguing that the Palestinian people are not a partner and that Israel will have to await the emergence of a new generation of Palestinians before there can be peace.

In contrast, Geneva Accord proponents argue that both the current Palestinian leadership and the Palestinian people are partners for peace. Geneva calls for empowerment of moderate Palestinians through negotiations with them and recognition of their legitimacy. Yet Sharon refuses to deal with Abu Ala or any other moderate Palestinian leader.

Sharon's plan for the West Bank does not contemplate Israeli responsibility for governing the Palestinians directly and providing them expensive services like education, health and municipal services. Yet Sharon plans to control the Palestinians by keeping IDF troops in the West Bank, controlling the main roads, and controlling the borders of the West Bank and Gaza, including the Gaza coastline. In short, Sharon wants to contain 3.2 million Palestinians, by controlling them from outside their populated areas with walls and fences, preserving military access, and dividing the internal space left to the Palestinians into enclaves, without accepting responsibility for governing them. Sharon answers the

argument that this threatens Israel's Jewish majority by claiming that because the Palestinians will not receive Israeli citizenship or be ruled directly by Israel, no demographic problem or a bi-national state exist.

The liberals in Israel argue that Sharon's plan will destroy Israel's democracy. They claim that if Israel maintains permanent control, even though it is indirect, over an unwilling Palestinian majority, Israel will become de facto a bi-national Jewish-Arab state. I agree. If Sharon has his way, Israel will become a combination of a militarized state like ancient Sparta and an apartheid state like the former South Africa that denies equal rights to the majority, creating a system I call "Spartheid." This would violate Jewish values and morality and would undermine the Zionist vision of a democratic, Jewish state.

The competing view that Zionism should be expansionist and that acquisition of territory in the West Bank and Gaza must continue through the use of the Army, settlements and cooperation between the IDF and settlers is now obsolete. That concept of Zionism must give way to a new Zionism that emphasizes the growth and well being of a Jewish democratic state within the pre-1967 borders at peace with the Palestinians and other Arab states. This must be accomplished through diplomacy, not force. Israel must abandon ambitions to control Palestinian territories and renew attention to building a better Israeli society through improved education, social welfare, and infrastructure. Shifting the Israeli project from expansion and settlement to internal rebuilding will require a change in Israeli identity. It will be very difficult, but it must be done.

Unfortunately, Sharon's policies are taking Israel in another direction. The alternative approach is the Geneva Accord that would renew final status negotiations with moderate Palestinian partners. Israel and the United States must also reach out to other partners who have been excluded, the Europeans and the moderate Arab states, and make them part of the Geneva approach. A renewed alliance between moderate, pragmatic Israelis and Palestinians would weaken the religious fundamentalist and extremists on both sides. Our Palestinian counterparts in Geneva want this no less than we do. Their stake in

avoiding a victory by Palestinian extremists in Hamas and the Islamic Jihad is just as strong as our stake in rescuing Israel from the settlement enterprise and the grave dangers of attempting to dominate and control the Palestinians.

Some Israelis argue that in ten years time, we will look back at Sharon's decision to evacuate settlements in Gaza as part of a larger design to uproot all the settlements, step by step. But I see no evidence, judging from Sharon's statements and his past actions, that he intends this. Indeed, all the evidence supports a design by Sharon to hang onto the West Bank as the central goal of his "disengagement" plan. In order to defeat Sharon's plan, the Israeli opposition must argue more effectively in favor of its alternative by demonstrating the dangers of Sharon's plan to Israel's future. The leaders of the Israeli opposition should resist Sharon's attempt to co-opt them by bringing them into his cabinet in a "unity" government. The role of the opposition is to transform public opinion in support of its own goals and thereby persuade Sharon to yield, or step aside in favor of a new leadership.

Most Israelis today are convinced that the majority of the Palestinians support terrorism and hate Jews. Israelis tend to believe what their leaders say, and this is the message they hear from the Sharon government. On the other hand, the majority of Israelis recognize that the status quo is untenable and that something must be done. The Palestinians have a mirror image of the Israelis and tend to demonize them. Paradoxically, on both sides many continue to support violent responses, while at the same time they understand that violence is not succeeding and that something else is needed. For the Israelis, unilateral disengagement seems to be the answer. Sooner or later both sides will realize that only a negotiated agreement will succeed, and in that context the logic of a mutual negotiated agreement along the lines of Geneva is very strong.