

# **BUSH-SHARON PACT** **ROUGHS OUT FINAL DEAL**

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*Note from Pastor Kevin: These developments continue to move us closer to the time of Jacob's troubles predicted in the Bible (Jeremiah 30). Large portions of the world (six billion souls) are on the verge of conflict because of a little strip of land and five million Jews who have returned there in direct fulfillment of several Old Testament prophecies pertaining to the last days (Ezekiel 36-37). The world leaders hope for peace, but peace will not come until the Prince of Peace, Jesus, returns.*

At Wednesday's historic summit in Washington, US President George W. Bush continued to give shape to a *de facto* solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, offering Prime Minister Ariel Sharon first-time written assurances on the critical issues of settlement blocs and the "right of return" in return for his disengagement plan.

The Bush-Sharon [exchange of letters](#) indeed reflects a major shift in US policy and deals a serious diplomatic blow to the surprised and outraged Palestinian leadership. But the American adjustment has actually been in the cards for some time now and the Palestinians have little reason to complain.

In return for a unilateral Israeli evacuation of the Gaza Strip and several isolated Jewish communities in northern Samaria, Bush assured Sharon that the US would work for a final status agreement on terms ostensibly more favorable to Israel.

First, Bush agreed that the roadmap to his vision of a two-state solution is the only path to take, meaning the Palestinians are locked into a plan that requires democratic reforms and an end to terror before any further progress.

Secondly, Israel will not be expected to uproot all settlements and fully return to the 1949 armistice lines, an implied US acceptance of Israel's eventual retention of key settlement blocs in Judea/Samaria.

Finally, the US is expressly endorsing the return of Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war to a future Palestinian state, rather than to Israel, thereby spoiling the Palestinian dream of demographically destroying the Jewish state.

Yasser Arafat and other Palestinian officials are denouncing the Bush Administration's trampling on Palestinian rights and are declaring the peace process "dead." But with British Prime Minister Tony Blair already on board and Washington pressing other world leaders to follow, the Palestinians will eventually have to wake up to the new reality or continue to fritter away more of their claims.

Bush's commitments to Israel on borders, settlements and refugees essentially mirror the suggested outline of a final accord that Bill Clinton verbally dictated to the parties in the waning days of his administration. Perhaps the only major

differences are the lack of any mention of a possible "land swap" or Israel's acceptance of a limited quota of refugees.

Bush appears to have adopted the basic Clinton parameters for a comprehensive deal, which were broadly supported in international circles, but he has taken a radically different approach to achieve them.

Clinton spent years coyly courting the Palestinians for the Oslo endgame and wound up with a war on his hands. Bush opted to speak frankly and offer major incentives in hopes it would finally change Palestinian behavior.

Though Clinton hinted at it, Bush was the first American president to speak openly about "ending the occupation" and creating a "Palestinian state." Yet the Palestinians refused to take the bait, and it has wrecked their relationship with Washington.

Bush's disappointment has been clear ever since his landmark June 24, 2002 speech that pre-conditioned US support for Palestinian statehood on democratic and financial reforms, along with the complete rejection of terrorism.

The Palestinians are protesting that Bush's new commitments to Israel will prejudice the outcome of final status negotiations. But the US president already crossed that line on their behalf when he determined that negotiations should result in a Palestinian state – something left up in the air until that point.

Over the decades, the Palestinian leadership elevated the right of return to a "sacred" right that no one can touch. Bush has told them in blunt terms they have been feeding their people a pipe dream.

The Palestinians have also been "unrealistic" about the settlements, says Bush. Indeed, they could have prevented these "facts on the ground" many years ago if they had just come to terms with Israel's existence.

Given these diplomatic setbacks, enraged Palestinians and their Arab/Islamic backers may now view the military option as even more attractive.

Meantime, Sharon must still sell his party and nation on the disengagement plan, which entails huge security risks and the ethnic cleansing of Jews from Gaza.

Thus the Washington summit spelled out more clearly than ever before how much of the world thinks this dispute should end, but it is still a long way off.