

# **WITHDRAWAL PAINS**

## **BY DAVID DOLAN**

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After successfully executing the first ever evacuation of Israeli citizens from their homes in the Gaza Strip and northern Samaria, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon struggled to remain in power during September. This came as thousands of Palestinians looted abandoned Jewish property in both areas, setting buildings on fire after stripping them of anything deemed valuable. Others were busy breaching the Sinai border fence between Gaza and Egypt; reinforcing concerns in Israel that the crowded coastal zone may be transformed into a major, heavily armed terrorist center.

Late in the month, over two dozen Palestinian Kassam rockets were fired into Israeli territory over a period of several days, most of them aimed at the frequently-targeted Israeli town of Sderot, where a number of civilians were wounded. The audacious and unprovoked attacks triggered a quick Israeli response, including air strikes on several Hamas targets. A car carrying four Hamas terrorists in Gaza City was struck by helicopter-borne missiles, killing the occupants. This was followed by the massing of IDF troops and artillery along the northern Gaza border fence in preparation for more action ahead. Artillery shells were then fired into empty portions of the coastal zone, apparently both to calibrate the weapons and to issue a stern warning against any further rocket assaults.

Although they began the latest round of violence, Hamas leaders vowed to revenge Israel's response by launching terror attacks all over Israel. A Jewish resident of Jerusalem was then kidnapped and murdered, with his body discovered near Ramallah.

### **WAR OF THE LEADERS**

Noting that they had predicted such renewed Palestinian rocket attacks in the wake of the Gaza withdrawal, former Likud Party leader Binyamin Netanyahu and fired cabinet minister Uzi Landau-both fierce opponents of the unilateral uprootings-challenged Sharon's tenuous hold over the sharply divided Likud by calling for an early internal party leadership vote in November. They contended that the move would help spark a necessary process to heal the gaping wounds that Sharon's withdrawal plan inflicted on the ruling party. The Likud leadership contest was originally scheduled for next April, with national Knesset elections due to be held by the end of November 2006.

Sharon's top aides again suggested that the Premier might bolt his party and form a new "centrist alliance" if the leadership contest was advanced, possibly bonding with Labor leader Shimon Peres and Shinui party chief Tommy Lapid. This only bolstered Netanyahu's charges that Sharon cares little for the fractured party, but mainly for his own personal career and place in history.

After dramatically resigning as Finance Minister just days before the Gaza uprootings began in mid-August, Netanyahu opened his Likud leadership bid with a fiery speech that poured scorn on the sitting PM. He said Sharon had nearly destroyed the conservative party, turning it into "an extension of the left wing Meretz party" headed by Oslo peace accord activist Yossi Beilen. Netanyahu vowed to move the Likud back toward the right if he becomes its next candidate for prime minister.

Without stating so outright, the former premier, who ran the country from mid-1996 until mid-1999, indicated he would not agree to any further Jewish evacuations from Samaria or Judea unless the Palestinian Authority unequivocally fulfills its initial Road Map peace plan commitment to fully disarm and dismantle terror groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Uzi Landau went even further, stating he would ensure that no Palestinian state would ever arise in the disputed zones if he is elected Israel's next leader.

On the eve of the September 27th Likud Central Committee vote, opinion polls published in several newspapers predicted that Netanyahu and Landau would have their way. However the actual result was extremely close, with a slight majority of voting party members backing Sharon's position. Therefore, the ballot remains scheduled for next April. Analysts said the cliffhanger vote was a strong indication that the leadership contest will be extremely intense.

## SHARON PUSHES PALESTINIAN STATE

Just days before the Likud party vote, PM declared that his former Finance Minister was "unfit to lead" the country after "spreading fear and panic" over the Gaza withdrawal. He added that Israel's international standing would be severely eroded if the "land for peace" withdrawal process was completely halted.

Sharon pointed to unprecedented accolades that he personally received from several Muslim leaders, including Pakistan's President Musharraf, as evidence that international backing for Israel had significantly increased as a result of the Gaza-Samaria pullouts. He also noted that his actions had been publicly praised by George W. Bush and other world leaders who met with him at United Nations headquarters in New York. Indeed, Bush, Tony Blair

and many others lauded Sharon for carrying out the controversial and emotive withdrawals, while calling for additional evacuations in the near future.

Netanyahu pointed out in response that almost identical claims had been made by PM Yitzhak Rabin in the wake of the September 1993 Oslo accord signing. He noted that the late leader's boasts proved entirely hollow in the end as the Palestinians gradually returned to the warpath, with the world subsequently heaping condemnations upon Israel for its unavoidable military response to the renewed violence and terrorism. Netanyahu predicted a similar outcome today-bolstered by a recent army intelligence report which forecasts an imminent renewed Palestinian attrition war, aided by Iran, Syria, Hizbullah and Al Qaida.

### SIMPLE FARMER

For the first time ever, Ariel Sharon addressed the UN General Assembly during his September visit-prompting several Islamic delegations to storm out of the illustrious chamber, including Iranian and Syrian diplomats. After repeating the usual mantra that "Jerusalem is Israel's eternal capital" and noting that he is a farmer as well as a politician who "loves the land of Israel," Sharon surprised many Likud activists by echoing most other world leaders in calling for the establishment of a Palestinian state next to Israel.

"The Palestinians will always be our neighbors. We respect them, and have no aspirations to rule over them. They are also entitled to freedom and to a national, sovereign existence in a state of their own." However, the Premier went on to call upon Palestinian leaders to "end all terrorism and incitement of violence and hatred" against Israelis if they want such a state to flourish. The UN speech came one week after Sharon told Israel's Channel 10 that "not all settlements in Judea and Samaria today will remain Israeli."

While Sharon was basking in the glow of his generally well-received UN speech, Israeli Attorney General Menachem Mazuz announced he would look into media reports that the PM had violated campaign laws by accepting large contributions from wealthy Jewish couples who paid \$10,000 to attend a gala fundraising dinner in New York. Under Israeli law, campaign contributions from foreign donors are limited to \$7,500 per couple. Several were said to have given additional sums to the Sharon campaign. The reports hardly helped his Likud party re-election prospects, refreshing memories of earlier campaign finance scandals that have shaken the Sharon family.

### OVER AND UNDER THE TOP

Binyamin Netanyahu's standing in the fractured Likud party and the wider

populace rose after one of his main complaints concerning PM Sharon's Gaza withdrawal plan proved prescient. He had long argued against the proposal to abandon control of the Philadelphi Corridor, located along the strategic southern Gaza border with Egypt, to Palestinian and Egyptian control. This would seriously endanger Israel's future security, he warned, with the border morphing into a major weapons smuggling conduit. Arab security personnel would do little if anything to stop illegal cross-border smuggling of heavy weapons, Netanyahu forecast, despite the fact that such arms are banned under the 1993 Oslo accord. Such weapons would then be used to launch ever more dangerous attacks upon nearby Israeli population centers like Ashkelon.

Even strong Israeli advocates of the government's Gaza withdrawal plan were shocked over how quickly Palestinian and Egyptian security personnel lost all control over the border corridor. This came soon after Sharon agreed to a compromise Egyptian plan that would close the Rafah border crossing outpost for up to six months while repairs are made, to be reopened under the auspices of European security monitors.

The chaotic border scenario unfolded when hundreds of Palestinians burrowed or blasted holes in the border fence and poured into Egyptian territory just hours after the final Israeli soldiers left the Gaza Strip on September 12th. Later the same day, lightly-armed Egyptian border guards were overwhelmed as tens of thousands of Palestinians forced their way through the Rafah crossing point. Who was entering Sinai and where they were going was anybody's guess. Many Palestinians said they were simply hoping to be reunited with family members living on the Egyptian side of the border. But others quickly faded into the sandy desert; their whereabouts and future intentions unknown.

Israeli media outlets reported that dozens of shoulder-launched anti-tank and aircraft rockets had been smuggled into Gaza across the porous border, which was finally sealed on September 18th by reinforced Egyptian and Palestinian forces after being virtually open to all comers for over one week. However Israeli army intelligence officials later countered these reports, stating that no such rockets or other heavy weaponry made it into the Gaza Strip. Still they estimated that up to 2,000 Russian-made rifles and many hand grenades and bullets were brought in by returning Palestinians, along with other banned weapons and illegal drugs. Later, the Ma'ariv newspaper reported that Kais Obeid, a senior Hizbullah leader in charge of overseeing terrorist contacts with the Palestinians, had actually flown from Beirut to Sinai to meet with leaders of the Fatah-linked Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades terror group who had slipped across the unsecured border.

While an estimated 100,000 Palestinians were traipsing back and forth across the open border, a general alert was sounded in Israel when a large

hole was discovered in the northern Gaza Strip security fence, not far from Ariel Sharon's private ranch. Authorities ordered local Israeli residents to remain in their homes as a search was conducted for the suspected infiltrators. Although it later turned out that involved Palestinians were simply entering Israel to look for work, the breach raised fresh concerns that determined terrorists will take advantage of the lack of internal Israeli control in the Gaza coastal zone to plan and execute new terrorist atrocities.

## BURNING PASSIONS

The Israeli public was equally traumatized in September when thousands of Palestinians went on a televised rampage in and around all uprooted Gaza Strip Jewish communities. The looting later spread to a couple of evacuated settlements in the hills of northern Samaria that were supposed to be still under overall Israeli army control.

Although it had long been anticipated that Hamas militants would dance on the roofs of abandoned Israeli homes, it was not expected that they would gleefully desecrate former Jewish synagogues while rejoicing over their perceived 'victory over the Zionist enemy.' There was additional widespread disgust when hundreds of Arab vandals plundered technologically advanced agricultural hothouses in the southern Gaza Strip that had been purchased by wealthy American Jews to provide continuing employment for local Palestinian residents.

The most difficult moment for many Orthodox Jews came when footage was shown of a Hamas religious leader saying Muslim prayers in the abandoned Netzarim synagogue, dedicating it to Islam and Allah. This was followed by looting of the building before portions were set on fire. Meanwhile the commander of the Hamas Izzaddin Kassam terrorist brigades, Muhammad Deif, released a video calling for the Palestinian jihad war to continue until Israel is no more: "We tell the Zionists who have desecrated our soil that all Palestine will become a hell for them. Today you have left Gaza in shame and you are continuing to occupy Palestine..I pray that Allah will assist us in liberating Al Quds (Jerusalem), the West Bank.Haifa.Nazareth.Ashkelon and the rest of Palestine."

As the video was being posted on a Hamas web site, a Palestinian homicide bomber blew himself up near the entrance to the Beersheva central bus station, wounding scores of people. The late August attack could have been much worse if two brave security guards had not intercepted the terrorist as he attempted to enter the crowded station. The terrorist had earlier been spotted by an alert bus driver near the station as he tried to board the driver's vehicle, which was bound for the city's Soroka Hospital. The driver signaled the security guards who gave chase and intercepted the young terrorist.

Both guards were severely wounded when the Hamas bomber pulled a cord on his suicide belt, setting off a powerful blast just outside the bus station. Israeli officials commended the two victims for their heroic interception. An Arab Beduin guard lost an eye and suffered serious burns in the explosion, while his Russian immigrant partner was severely disfigured. The Muslim terrorist was believed to be intent on committing mass slaughter in the large Negev hospital, despite the fact that it has long served many Gaza Strip Palestinians as well as local Israelis.

## STORMY WEATHER

Israel was among many nations that offered immediate aid to the United States in the wake of the devastating Hurricane Katrina. In fact, officials in Jerusalem were among the first to launch preparations to rush disaster teams to the affected Gulf coast. However, the offer was rebuffed by American leaders who were apparently concerned that the presence of Israeli military disaster experts might offend international Muslim sensibilities-an exact copy of what occurred early this year when Israel attempted to assist tsunami-stricken Sri Lanka.

Dozens of Israeli Orthodox religious leaders delivered sermons or gave media interviews during September noting the many similarities between the latest US catastrophe and the unilateral Israeli withdrawal process; particularly forced civilian evacuations, complete destruction of many homes and businesses, and the sudden displacement of citizens forced into temporary shelters. They opined that Katrina's wrath-which struck Florida just two days after the final uprootings were completed in northern Samaria, and five days before the huge storm devastated the Gulf coast-was a form of Divine judgment upon America for its central role in pushing forward the harrowing withdrawal process.

Some rabbis later noted that September's follow-up Hurricane Rita caused the shutdown of George Bush international airport in Houston-named after the current President's father, who presided over the seminal Mideast peace conference that jumpstarted Israeli-Palestinian peace talks in 1991. Others noticed that it caused serious flood damage in portions of Texas and Arkansas, where the last three US leaders, who all prodded their Israeli counterparts to accept the potentially suicidal "land for peace" process, hail from. Rita struck just days after the current Commander in Chief, speaking at UN headquarters, reiterated US calls for more Jewish evacuations, followed by the rapid establishment of a Palestinian state next to tiny Israel.

It is impossible to say for certain that Israel's Sovereign Lord was sending a glaring message by allowing the twin hurricanes to strike and seriously wound the world's currently reigning superpower in her oil energy heartland. Still, it surely behooves all world leaders, whatever their personal religious

beliefs, to be aware that the Hebrew Bible foretells that God will "enter into judgment" with all nations at the end of time who have played a role in "dividing up My land" (Joel 3:2).

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DAVID DOLAN is a Jerusalem-based author and journalist who has lived in Israel since 1980. His new DVD, titled "FOR ZIONS'S SAKE-REPORTING FROM THE LAND OF THE BIBLE," will be released soon on both PAL and NTCS versions. To order in North America for just \$15 postage free, phone toll free 888-639-8530 or send an e mail to [patsi@yourisraelconnection.org](mailto:patsi@yourisraelconnection.org) The e mail address should be used for all international orders. . HOLY WAR FOR THE PROMISED LAND (Broadman & Holman), his latest book, is an overview of the history of the Israel and of the bitter Arab-Israeli conflict that rages there, plus some autobiographical details about the author's experiences living in the land since 1980. It especially examines the important role that militant Islam plays in the conflict. . ISRAEL IN CRISIS: WHAT LIES AHEAD? (Baker/Revell), which examines the political and biblical prospects for a regional attack upon Israel, settlement in the disputed territories, and related topics, is also available for purchase, along with an updated edition of his end-time novel, THE END OF DAYS (21st Century Press). You may order these books at a special discount price by visiting his web site at [www.ddolan.com](http://www.ddolan.com), or by phoning 888-890-6938 in North America, or by e mail at: [resources@yourisraelconnection.org](mailto:resources@yourisraelconnection.org) TO RECEIVE THESE FREE ISRAEL UPDATES DIRECTLY, FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS BELOW. YOU WILL ONLY RECEIVE DAVID DOLAN'S UPDATE AND ANALYSIS INFORMATION FROM THIS ADDRESS. THE LIST WILL NOT BE TRADED OR SOLD.

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