

Editorial/comment

Offer Labor real share of power

Ehud Barak's decision last week to reverse course, and pull out of a unity government he'd previously agreed to join, has provoked dismay in many quarters.

The most frequently-heard criticism was that this was yet another of the zigzags that marked the 19 months in office of Israel's outgoing prime minister; that also helped lead to his crushing defeat by Likud Party leader Ariel Sharon in Israel's February 6 prime ministerial election.

Barak did reverse course this time - but he had reason to, if allegations he's made about the unity government Sharon is trying to build are true.

Sharon did reportedly offer Barak's Labor Party two out of three senior cabinet positions in the proposed unity government, and an additional five cabinet posts. Of the three senior portfolios, he was said to have offered Barak the job of defence minister.

But according to Barak, Sharon was planning to offer concessions to him and to his Labor Party in name only. In a letter he released February 20, Barak said Sharon had made clear he expected to decide policy on his own, and

keep Labor out of "core decision-making".

Some other ministers in the outgoing Labor Party government had resisted joining in a Sharon-led unity government for the same reason.

They argued that Sharon would use Labor's presence in the government as a "fig leaf", to create the impression the harder line he plans to pursue in the peace process will have broad backing.

Among other things, Sharon has made clear he won't remove any Jewish settlements from the West Bank, will return far less territory than Barak offered the Palestinians, and won't try to pursue a final peace agreement - only a series of "interim peace deals". He also rejected Barak's demand that he keep the most hawkish parties in the Knesset out of his government.

That might suit the rightwing parties that form the core of Sharon's support. But it's highly unlikely to lead to peace, and could lead to war.

Unless Sharon is willing to make meaningful compromises in the peace process, it probably is in Labor's interests to stay out of a unity government, and offer a clear alternative to the Israeli electorate in the next elections.

Dry Bones

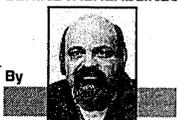


Likud 'wolf' hoping to 'dwell' with Labor 'lambs'

Prime-minister-elect Ariel Sharon has good reason to seek broadly-based 'unity' government

As outgoing prime minister Ehud Barak gets ready to leave the prime minister's office and put his political career behind him, Israel is waiting to see who will replace him as Labor Party leader.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES



By YORAM EAST

The issue isn't only the power of the new

interim leader, chosen this week by the Labor Party Central Committee; it's also whether the new leader will be able to guide his badly-injured party into the proposed government of national unity headed by Prime Minister-Elect Ariel "Arik" Sharon.

Labor Party developments will also reveal whether the party can recuperate from the blows it suffered in the prime ministerial election February 6. Polls have shown an erosion in



ARIEL SHARON, Likud Party leader, on the campaign trail last month: Creating a broadly-based unity government might allow him to go down in history as an elder statesman. *Isranet photo.*

popular support for the party, especially since the outbreak of major Palestinian violence last September.

Political observers, and commentators, agree almost unanimously that the Barak era, which started with high hopes in many areas, from internal politics to the peace issue, ended as a monumental failure. The outgoing prime minister is leaving office bruised, not only by the Israeli electorate, but also by

his own party members and close friends.

A man who once led the Israel Defence Force as chief of staff and is the most decorated soldier in Israel's history, he's going home without much to show for his almost two years as prime minister and minister of defence.

It was during his watch that Israel found herself in an almost impossible strategic situation, deteriorating security,

and sliding morale. The man who was groomed by the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin to be a leader and his successor is leaving bitterly, full of accusations aimed at his party, Israelis who did not vote for him, and Sharon. Barak claims Sharon offended him during the last two weeks of the "political tango" between them, during their attempt to form a national unity coalition.

Some of the candidates touted to replace Barak in the Labor Party are veteran politicians like Avraham Burg, Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, Haim Ramon, Shimon Peres and others, who would love to see themselves as ministers of defence or foreign affairs under Sharon.

Another challenge now is to identify Sharon's main goals. Early analysis shows that the man once nicknamed "The Bulldozer" learned from his past mistakes, and that he will try to strengthen his position internally before embarking on another Middle East peace effort.

Sharon learned from Barak's mistakes, and realized he needs a broadly-based government of mainly secular parties to ensure survival of his future government.

He knows that for the next two and a half years, the Knesset will remain divided along the same lines, and that he will have to do his utmost to unite more than 60 Knesset members to prevent a vote of non-confidence.

That would topple his government, and pave the way for former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to challenge his leadership of the Likud Party. With the support of his old allies in the religious and ultra-Orthodox camps, Netanyahu could take over and re-emerge as Israel's prime minister.

Sharon is experienced and understands the undercurrents of Israeli parliamentary politics, knowing that his success in the February 6 election might be the ultimate opportunity for him to go down in history as an elder statesman.

(Cont. on page 5. See "Yoram East".)

Comment/ letters

The bullets keep flying

Arab terrorist violence nothing new

Where Israel's security problems are concerned, the more things change, the more they remain the same.

ISRAEL UPDATE



By NECHEMIA MEYERS

Last week that oft-quoted saying kept echoing in my head as I drove to the funeral of an old friend of mine in Urim, a Negev kibbutz.

This is because Urim, where I lived soon after my arrival in Israel 50 years ago, is the place where I first became acquainted with the violence that has plagued the Jews of this country for a full century. In the '50s, the Arabs doing the shooting were called Fedayun rather than Fatah or Hamas, but the parameters were not all that different.

During that period, I wrote an article that described the atmosphere at Urim in the following words: "It is impossible to relax for a minute. Every night weapons must be checked, guards detailed, ambushes laid. Guns become a part of the landscape. Children grow up giving them no more thought than they give to tractors or trucks."

"The situation is reflected in the weary eyes of the settlers who know no real rest, in the glances of concerned mothers who wonder if their babies are really safe, in the not-so-funny joke about the kibbutz member who just missed being hit by metal fragments from an exploding hand grenade."

Those who travelled the roads of the Negev faced even greater danger than their families and friends who remained on the kibbutz.

Yoram East

(Cont. from page 4.)

He would be seen as a leader that left the stains of the 1982 war in Lebanon behind him.

Sharon has already hinted that he will not start his watch by making concessions to the Syrians. He will not negotiate over the future of Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley, and the Palestinian claim of right of return. And he will not yield to political blackmailing by the religious parties.

Those were, after all, the main areas that led to Barak's defeat.

As I write these lines, Barak's rivals are starting to fight over his position, and Sharon is using all his power to forge his "Dream Team".

To paraphrase the immortal words of the prophet Isaiah, "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb"; Sharon is the wolf who seeks to dwell with the Labor lambs.

The writer, a Winnipegger, is a former colonel in the Israel Defence Force, and serves as North American correspondent for the Tel Aviv daily, Maariv.



An injured soldier being taken to an ambulance after a terrorist attack in Israel this month: The Negev Desert is safer from such attacks than in the 1950s. But shootings of Israelis are still happening in other parts of the country and the occupied territories. *Copyright: Isranet.*

Thus, in 1954, an Urim truck driver on his way to the nearby settlement of Gvar-Am was suddenly fired upon by a group of Arabs who had lain in wait at the side of the road. The bullets riddled the vehicle, but by some miracle, the driver escaped with only slight burns from the ones that grazed him. When he returned home, he discovered that there were 25 bullet holes in the truck door alone, his windshield had been smashed to pieces, and the wooden body of his vehicle was completely perforated with holes.

Then as now, Israel's arguments were not always received with understanding by the international community, and the Israel-Egypt Mixed Armistice Commission subsequently rejected an Israeli complaint in regard to the incident, because "there was insufficient evidence that it had taken place as described."

This annoyed me so much that I wrote a letter to *The Jerusalem Post* stating: "The bullet holes are certainly there. They were made by the standard ammunition of the Egyptian Army and the footprints of those who ambushed the truck driver led back to the Gaza Strip. This makes me wonder how many bullet holes constitute 'sufficient proof.'"

When I looked around the Urim cemetery in the course of the funeral, I saw that very few of those buried there had fallen victim to Arab hostility. And the chances that there will be more is not great, because the Negev is now much safer than it was in the '50s.

But the bullets are flying elsewhere, and all too many funerals of their victims are being held in other parts of Israel.

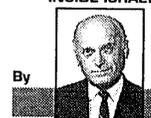
The writer lives in Rehovot, Israel.

A Palestinian state - second thoughts

It would create more problems than it solves

On paper and in theory, the proposal to establish an independent state of Palestine sounds logical, despite the fact that there had never been a Palestinian national entity, and there has been no history or tradition of Palestinian nationalism until very recent times.

INSIDE ISRAEL



By CARL ALPERT

Nevertheless, the existence of a large population, speaking the same language, and possessed of a common faith, would appear to justify self-government, especially since the alternative would appear to be political domination by the State of Israel, which has no desire to absorb a large and potentially hostile population.

And so the negotiations of what was called a peace process sought to define the nature of the proposed new state, its borders and its relations with its Jewish neighbor.

Even as the politicians and statesmen argued over details, forward-looking Israeli businessmen and industrialists began to plan for the economic development of the infant state and its relationship with Israel. Specific plans were drawn up for creation of a joint high-tech industrial park on the Gaza-Israel border, at which the miracles of Israel's achievements in this field would be shared with our neighbors, and employment opportunities offered.

In the meantime the peace talks dragged on. Arafat made demands. Prime Minister Barak offered concessions, whereupon Arafat made further demands. Barak



YASSER ARAFAT, Palestinian Authority president: A government on the verge of bankruptcy.

yielded. Arafat sensed weakness in the Israeli stand and insisted on more, introducing violence to enforce his demands.

There is reason to believe that if Arafat had signed at that point, guaranteeing a peaceful relationship, the Israeli public would have endorsed Barak's deal, despite its concessions. A true peace would have been considered worth the sacrifices entailed. But Arafat wanted more. The negotiations collapsed, and the public swept Sharon into office.

Today the Palestinian Authority (PA), supposed to be the predecessor of the new state, is on the verge of bankruptcy. It is unable to cover its own administrative and operational costs. It is also unable to assure economic stability for its population. As a result of the continuing violence, Israel keeps the borders closed to prevent infiltration of terrorists, and there is little likelihood that any large numbers of Palestinians will be

able to find jobs in Israel, as in the past. Unemployment has gone way up. There is no domestic industrial growth to speak of. Income which had been expected from Israel, by agreement, is being held up because of the continued rioting and terrorism. Dependence on Israel has never been more effectively demonstrated.

To complicate matters even more, Israeli merchants who had previously done business with the Palestinians now claim that the latter have wretched on paying some \$48 million U.S. of debts, and the Israelis demand that their government deduct this sum from the amounts which Israel had offered to pay the PA.

Half a year ago, the neighboring oil-rich Arab states offered to contribute a billion dollars to meet the human needs of the Palestinian population. Very little of that money has been sent because Arafat refuses to reveal details of the expenditures.

An independent state of Palestine is simply non-viable. Realizing that, Arafat has again and again postponed its formal establishment. But if, as a result of Arab stubbornness, it does come into existence, it will be a constant source of trouble, both locally and on the international scene.

It is now clear that establishment of an independent state is going to solve no problems, and will only create more.

The writer lives in Haifa, Israel.

LETTERS

Agree with both letters

Having been involved in importing and distributing kosher foods in Western Canada for approximately 50 years, I am in total agreement with the views expressed by Philip Weiss (letter, "Trivia (pyste zachen)") and David Diamond (letter, "Very poor business decisions" *The Jewish Post & News* February 21.).

DONALD WEIDMAN
Winnipeg