

# Sharon Plan, US Stamp

By Bassam Dally

While the world attention is captivated by the unfolding events in Falluja and the taking of foreigners as hostages in Iraq the Israeli Prime Minister, Sharon, is exchanging "letters" with the Bush administration during an official visit this week. According to governmental sources, Sharon's visit to the US will focus on explaining the Israeli plan of disengagement and hearing the US administration response to it.

The Israeli plan, which was made public a few weeks ago, will see Israel evacuate four out of the seven settlements in the Gaza Strip and end its military occupation of this area. Such a plan, at its face value, can be viewed as a positive step in the right direction, however this unilateral step is part of a more comprehensive plan and should be viewed in this context.

On the local front, the separation plan can see the Gaza strip sealed off to the outside world. Workers will not be allowed to enter Israel to seek employment, the Israeli army will control borders with Egypt and the Israeli navy will maintain the blockade from the sea. Such an arrangement will see the imprisonment of one million Palestinians with their survival still dependent on the Israeli army and access to jobs.

On the other hand, Israel's financial gain out of this move is quite substantial. Israel's obligations, as the occupying force, to provide for the Palestinians will cease along with the burden of substantial military expenditure. This should never be allowed to happen as pulling out of the Gaza Strip does not amount to full independence and the international community should take part in this process to ensure that the situation does not deteriorate any further.

Israel's gains from this plan seem to be far reaching. Israeli withdrawal will be rewarded by US approval of land annexation in the West Bank. It is reported that a US letter, will reiterate the commitment to a two state solution emphasising that the determination of borders in a final status accord will take into consideration "demographic realities" on the ground. Such a declaration is in obvious breach of international law and shows US conspiracy in Israeli actions against the Palestinians.

It is quite tragic to the Palestinians that a country like the US signs off on their land and livelihood with clear disregard for their concern and future. It just adds to the century long betrayal by the West of the Palestinian people. This "Bush Letter" will be added to letters from McMahon to the Shareif Hussien, the Balfour Declaration, Sykes-Picot treaty and the Oslo Declaration as yet another colonialist action. The common aspect of all these letters and promises is that external political agendas, other than the best interest of the Palestinians, motivate and dictate its terms and conditions.

The Israeli plan so far has been successfully executed and is reaching its final stages. Sharon is well known as the champion of the settlements and his latest plan is not a turning point in his ideology. Sharon's plan can be described as the "Gaza Only" plan. The Strip's high population density and lack of resources made Jewish settlements less popular there.

The Sharon plan was executed in three phases. The first phase saw the Israeli army systematically destroy the infrastructure, the civil administration and the police force in the West Bank as a pretext to create chaos and disorder and justify full occupation. While at the same time the Gaza Strip was left untouched despite the occasional clashes with the army. The Gaza only solution was then presented to the Palestinians which they refused for obvious

reasons. Nonetheless, this did not deter the Israeli government which proceeded to create obstacles for any other solution to materialise.

The second phase was to discredit the Palestinian leadership and to convince the world community that the Palestinians are not interested in any peace negotiations which in essence gave the legitimacy to the Israeli government to reoccupy the West Bank and have a free hand in confiscating more land and building more settlements.

The third phase of the plan is to make the livelihood of the Palestinians even more difficult with a Wall being built as the largest prison in the world. It is quite obvious that the scale and investment on this Wall points to a long term strategy despite the inventive names that the Israeli government tries to describe it by. The enclosure of the Palestinians within this Wall will have far reaching consequences beyond any other action by this government. The impact on the local economy, which heavily depends on the Israeli need for cheap labour and local agriculture, is larger than one can predict today. The Wall will only add to the despair and frustration of the Palestinians and will help fuel more extremists' views and lead to more bloodshed and grievances for both sides. It is highly disturbing that the US and the international community are almost silent on the issue of the Wall and they are only concerned about its route rather its existence in the first place.

It is highly likely that the US government is fully aware of these plans and that is apparent in their disinterest in reducing the tension or bringing the parties back to the negotiation table. Instead, the US administration worked to defuse any international concerns with the odd condemnation. This latest letter is another ploy to show the world that they are still active on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It is always the case with these letters and declarations that they are sweetened with empty promises and phoney statements which if analysed thoroughly amount to no real benefits for the four million Palestinians in the occupied territories or the two million refugees in neighbouring Arab countries. The promised letter which will give Israel the green light to annex West Bank lands, and most likely lead to a legislation to declare it part of the State of Israel is compounded with the road map, two state solution and the refugees issue. Israeli officials believe the section of this letter from Bush referring to final status borders is highly significant. They believe it constitutes US recognition of Israel's future annexation of West Bank settlement blocs and the negation of a right of Palestinian refugee return to Israel.

The timing of such letter cannot be any more obvious. Israel tried desperately to pressure the previous administration to move the US embassy to Jerusalem as recognition of its status as the capital of Israel. Now with the US election looming on the horizon, Israel is having its best chance to help its expansionist policy one step further.

It is not surprising that every act of resistance in the Middle East or Afghanistan is tied with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The US and its allies are supporting the Israeli government on all its actions. It is time that the US and the international community recognise that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict goes beyond the borders of Gaza and the West Bank and the war against terrorism should start by having an even handed policy in the Middle East. The European Union and Australia should take a strong stand against the Israeli plans and should use their alliance with the US to bring the two parties back to the negotiating table. If the international community is serious about world peace more effort should be spent on stopping these Israeli plans by taking a more active role in imposing international law and respect for human rights.

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