

{JANUARY 08 2005}

HOW THE HELL DID THIS HAPPEN?

How the hell did I get into this goddamned mess? I wake up in the morning and can't believe it. What, I, Arik Sharon, am waging a war against the settlers? I, who put them there in the first place? I, who drafted the map of the settlements long before the settlers themselves ever dreamed of it?

How, for God sake, did this start? What did I want, after all?

President Bush asked me to produce a peace plan of some kind. He needed it for his reelection campaign. Alright then, shouldn't I do him a favor, after he supported us on everything just to get a good word from me, frequently performing a U-turn, like with the settlement blocs?

I also had to do something to put an end to the ravings of this Beilin fellow. His "peace plan" got an international echo, presidents and prime ministers danced around him. That could have been dangerous. First of all, because it could undermine the public conviction that "we have no partner for peace". True, we have Ehud Barak to thank for this, but it is still the most effective weapon in our arsenal. So I had to produce something that would sweep this initiative off the table and also put me back into the center of Israeli and international attention. It had got around that I am old, tired, weak, without initiative; that I am letting things drift. What, I am old? I am weak? So I took grabbed this plan and demonstrated just how resolute, steadfast, and strong-willed I am.

And look what happened: for a whole year already, my "disengagement plan" has been creating upheavals in Israel and keeping the whole world busy. Everybody recognizes that it is the only game in town.

True, I did not think much before I floated it. And truly I never dreamt that it would assume such proportions.

What, after all, did I propose? That we pull the army out of the Gaza Strip and evacuate the settlements there. The Americans asked me to add a handful of tiny settlements in North Samaria, so I did. Big deal.

As always, I had a plan for the best case and a plan for the worst case. In the best case,

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I reckoned, nothing will come of it at all. Either the nobleman or the horse will die (*). And in the meantime I would have proved that I am really a man of peace, I would have created a world-wide sensation, I would look good. And in the end we would not have to relinquish one square inch or remove one single settler.

In the worst case, if this did not succeed and I really had to implement the plan, that would not be bad either. I would integrate it in my grand design of annexing the best part of Judea and Samaria, and leaving the Arabs in half a dozen enclaves. After all, the Gaza Strip will in any case become one of these enclaves. Anyone want these Arabs in the State of Israel?

I was sure that the leaders of the settlers would understand this logic. I invited them for private talks on my farm and told them: Look, boys (what, aren't they my boys?), I am going to execute a brilliant manoeuvre. We shall sacrifice some small settlements. All the settlements in Gaza and some in Samaria. In the next phases we shall also have to sacrifice some of the more serious settlements in the heart of Samaria. Sorry, but there's no way to avoid it.

True, it hurts. I told you in advance that there would be "painful concessions", didn't I? But look at it from the historical point of view: we shall evacuate some thousands of settlers, but we shall save the other 200 thousand. Not only that, but further along the road we shall bring in hundreds of thousands more settlers and settle them on all the land that we shall annex in Judea and Samaria. It's like pruning a few branches of a tree in order to deepen its roots and enlarge its crown.

I was sure that they would jump at it. What, don't they know me? Haven't I talked with them hundreds of times? Didn't they stay on my farm days and nights? Don't they understand the historic dimensions of this plan? Don't they see that this is a giant step forwards to the realization of Zionism?

I told them: Zionism means a Jewish state in all of Eretz Israel, without Arabs. This is a historic process. Zionism always knew how to realize at every phase what could be realized at that stage. It understood the limitations of power and took at every point what it could take, without giving up its determination to achieve the rest in due course.

Our task in the present phase is to annex most of Judea and Samaria, leaving the Arabs - for the time being - in Gaza, Hebron, Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin and their surroundings. Let them call this a Palestinian State, what do we care? But for this we must evacuate some settlements. A few dozens, yes, among them some of the most precious ones. That hurts? Yes, it does. But one has to look at the big picture. Think about the end, the final phase, when you and I won't be around anymore. Then the Arabs will be removed from these areas, too.

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So what happened? The settlers started to rave. Not one single settlement can be removed, they shouted.

I told them: Look, I am a soldier. Before the battle of Abu Ageila (***) I knew that so-and-so many soldiers would be killed. It is not that I didn't think for a moment about the bodies, about the bereaved families. But that did not hold me back. If the aim was important enough to sacrifice these soldiers, they had to be sacrificed. No hesitation. No second thoughts. If somebody is not able to do this, he cannot be a commander. So look at it this way.

I thought they would understand. It's logical. But it appears that they don't give a damn for logic. They were in a trance. All kinds of crazies, rabbis and born-again Jews, were driving them along. They said that if we evacuate one single settlement, the process cannot be stopped anymore. That in the end we shall evacuate all of them. I tried to calm them down, but they were running amok.

And for whom? For the settlers of Gush Katif would you believe, who were Labor people to start with. Who put them there? Israel Galili and Moshe Dayan (***). So they should not talk about God and the Biblical commandment to cultivate Eretz Israel. But the religious hard core of the Judea and Samaria settlers are inciting them, and now it is starting to look like a war between the people of Israel and the settlers as a whole.

Would anyone have believed five years ago that I, Arik, would become the Enemy No.1 of the settlers? That they would curse me and plot to kill me? That I would be readying the army for the evacuation of the settlers, who I myself have raised and pampered? That's the irony of history.

I would be much happier at this moment if I were with those guys, the settlers, and was raising hell against another Prime Minister.

Somebody wrote that this is a war between the State of Israel and the Jewish State. That it concerns the very identity of the state. That I, a native-born Israeli from Malal village, will break the religious fanatics of the settlements, who want to destroy Israeli democracy. Nothing could be further from my thoughts. I have always respected the religious people and their rabbis. Once I even put my foot in my mouth and said that it is more important to study the Talmud than to serve in a combat unit in the army.

But what alternative do I have? I feel as if I am swimming in the sea and currents much stronger than myself are sweeping me along. I cannot withdraw from the plan, because I have an obligation to Bush and because I have to look determined and iron-willed, otherwise Bibi and the other hyenas in the party will eat me for breakfast. And I have to protect the army. Without the army, what will be left of Israel?

So that's that. One must get up for another working day. One must set up a coalition with all those nonentities, plan the moves against Abu Mazen who will be elected

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tomorrow and is trying to outfox me with honeyed words . And, most importantly - deal with the settlers, who will yet cause a civil war.

Who would have believed that it would come to this?

(*) Here Sharon is alluding to the classic Jewish joke about the Polish nobleman who threatens to kill his Jew if he does not teach his horse to read.

(**) Sharon's most famous battle during the 1967 war.

(***) Galili and Dayan were both hawkish Labor Party leaders.

AVNERY | MARIE AND THE GHOSTS

AVNER Y | SHARON'S SKIN AND BUSH'S SPOTS