

Rattling the Cage: Kadima's cockamamie idea

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Mar. 8, 2006

The best thing I can say about Kadima's new settlement evacuation plan for the West Bank is that it's so pointless, so half-assed, that it'll never get off the ground. All it offers Israel is a huge amount of pain in return for negligible gain, if that.

The plan laid out this week by Avi Dichter, the former Shin Bet chief who is Kadima's brightest star on security, calls for Israel to evacuate settlements containing about 15,000 settlers on the far side of the West Bank security barrier. The settlements emptied out, however, would not be handed over to the Palestinians as was done in Gaza.

Instead, the IDF would move in to take the settlers' place. In essence, the evacuated settlements - which include pockets of fanaticism like Yitzhar, Itamar, Kfar Tapuah, Har Bracha, Maon and Sussiya - would become IDF bases.

The 15,000 uprooted settlers would then be consolidated with the other 225,000 or so Israelis living in the West Bank into seven large settlement blocs. The whole process, Dichter says, would take about four years.

On first hearing, this plan might even sound attractive - it dismantles unwanted, isolated settlements, but without diminishing Israel's security, and without giving the Palestinians any "prizes for terror."

On second hearing, though, the plan reveals a shortcoming: It achieves not a single goal that Kadima and Ehud Olmert, along with the majority of Israelis, want to achieve. For instance:

- Kadima's plan doesn't bring about separation from the Palestinians; Israel will remain every bit as entangled with them as it is now, only with more soldiers and fewer settlers at the friction points.
- The plan doesn't shorten or in any other way change Israel's border with the Palestinians in the West Bank; that border would remain exactly where it is today - all the way over on the Jordan River.
- The plan doesn't alter Israel's demographics - its mix of Jews and Arabs - in the slightest; four years from now, after the evacuated settlers were replaced by soldiers, the number of Palestinians living under Israel's control would have grown just as if Israel had left the West Bank untouched.
- The plan doesn't end the occupation or even curtail it; actually, with more soldiers in the West Bank, the occupation could even harden.
- It doesn't give Palestinians in the West Bank anything that could be called statehood, independence, the means with which to go their own way. A mapping out of the plan shows the West Bank being gouged out by gaping Israeli settlement blocs - not just along the Green Line to the west and Jordan Valley to the east, but right down the middle, too. Dichter's plan features a Karnei Shomon-Kedumim enclave, an Ofra-Beit El enclave, a Ma'aleh Adumim bloc that would almost cut the West Bank in half, and a Hebron-Kiryat Arba enclave. It looks more like a diagram of colon cancer than a map of a Palestinian state.
- For all these reasons, no government in the world - no body of reasonable opinion for that matter - would support Israel on this.

ALL THIS plan might accomplish would be to make the settlers somewhat less of a security burden on the IDF, allowing the army to fight terrorists more efficiently. But then again, it might not.

What's certain is that the government, IDF and Israel Police would be engaged in a four-year battle royal against the most violent, radical settlers in this country, along with their masses of sympathizers, across the hills of Judea and Samaria and highways of Israel proper. Four years of absolute hell - not for the sake of separation, or rational borders, or a Jewish state, or democracy. Rather, for the sake of nothing more than a redesign of the same old occupation, the same old mutual Israeli-Palestinian stranglehold, that's been in place since the Six Day War.

Dichter could not have come out with this to the media without Olmert's approval. This is no trial balloon; this is Kadima's unofficial policy for the next government, which it almost certainly will lead after the March 28 election.

Sooner or later, I figure Olmert will quietly walk away from this proposal. It offers no solution for the West Bank. The only solution - once Gazan rocket fire is brought under control - is genuine disengagement: the unilateral withdrawal of all 65,000 or so settlers in the isolated settlements, along with the Israeli soldiers protecting them, to the Israeli side of the West Bank security barrier.

The policy unveiled by Dichter is a odd package, but what's even odder is that he is Kadima's premier strategist for how Israel should deal with the Palestinians. As head of the Shin Bet, Dichter made no secret of his adamant opposition to the Gaza disengagement; today he's planning the future of the West Bank for a party that came into being because of the Gaza disengagement.

This is not an encouraging sign of what's likely to come after Election Day.



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