

Last update - 10:21 31/01/2006

The wages of unilateralism

By Moshe Arens

In August 2005, 10,000 Israelis were forcibly removed from their homes in Gush Katif and northern Samaria, while Kassam rocket launching sites were allowed to move into areas formally occupied by the settlements of Elei Sinai, Nissanit, and Dugit, thus moving them into range of Ashkelon, one of Israel's larger cities.

Less than half a year later, Hamas won the Palestinian elections decisively, achieving control over the Palestinian population in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. While many had given their unreserved approval to Sharon's unilateral withdrawal project, and others felt that the jury was still out regarding the wisdom of this move, history handed in its verdict last week - it was no more than a piece of foolishness. The Hamas victory, a blow to the chances for peace in the area, and an increased threat to Israel's security interests, is the direct result of that ill-conceived and misbegotten project.

There is no doubt that much of the Palestinian population was fed up with the corruption of the Arafat clique that ran the Palestinian Authority since the Oslo Accords, and that it possibly considered Hamas, the authors of much of the suicide bombings that have killed Israeli men, women and children in recent years, clean and incorruptible. This may have contributed to the Hamas victory. But all Palestinian polls had shown that the vast majority saw in the Israeli unilateral withdrawal a great Palestinian victory, which was the direct result of the campaign of terror waged in the past years by Palestinian terrorist groups, a campaign in which Hamas took a leading role. Thus Hamas received what most saw as well-deserved credit for this Palestinian victory at the recent polls.

How did so many Israelis, a nation of intelligent and politically alert citizens, fall for this plan? What was the conception that infiltrated itself into the minds of so many Israelis pushing aside caution and good sense? The Greeks had a word for it - hubris. What is unilateralism if not hubris - arrogance and disregard of others. The proponents of disengagement, the men and women who have found a place under the umbrella of the Kadima party, proudly announce that we are going to take our destiny into our own hands, that we are not going to wait for partners for peace, that we are going to unilaterally determine Israel's borders, and that the Palestinians can stew in their juices behind the fences we are rushing to complete. Now that is the kind of talk many Israelis like to hear.

But on second thought, the emptiness of this kind of talk becomes clear. No man is an island, and no nation is an island. We live in a world of interdependence, and this is most certainly true of Israel and the Palestinians. What we do affects them, and what they do affects

us. Unilateralism is simply not a viable concept in this day and age, and permanent borders that would put an end to a conflict cannot be established unilaterally. Tunnels are dug under fences, and Kassam rockets and mortar shells fly over them. Every area from which Israel withdraws unilaterally becomes a breeding ground for terrorism against Israel; just look at what happened in the Gaza Strip since Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gush Katif and the Philadelphi corridor.

To have disregarded the Palestinian perception of an Israeli unilateral withdrawal and the subsequent effect on Palestinian behavior was unpardonable. But all reasoned arguments against the unilateral withdrawal plan could not overcome the arrogance and blind stubbornness of its proponents. And so the plan moved ahead, people were torn out of their homes, agricultural land was laid waste, synagogues were left to be destroyed by celebrating vandals, and Kassam rocket launchers were moved north.

And now, with the Hamas victory in the Palestinian elections, the whole house of cards that explained and justified this foolish move has collapsed, leaving behind 10,000 homeless Israeli citizens and a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority on the other side of the unilateral border the government tried to establish. Palestinian terrorism has been rewarded and encouraged, and Israel will have to suffer the consequences.

The unilateral withdrawal experiment has failed, but those who carried out this experiment want a chance to continue experimenting with Israel's future. Kadima is presenting itself to Israel's voters in the coming election with a collection of candidates gathered from other parties, with no platform, no institutions, and with a call for the establishment of a presidential executive system in Israel (like in Putin's Russia), so that if elected, they will be guaranteed a full four years to continue with their experiments. The voters will have to decide.

</hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=676700>

[close window](#)