

Israeli Left is Opting For Suicide

By [Tanya Reinhart](#)

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To judge by the political discourse, being a leftist today means supporting Sharon. Even when his government decides yet again to postpone the evacuation of the illegal outposts to an unknown future date, the pundits explain that the mere fact that he even raised the matter for discussion in the government is indicative of the seriousness of his intentions. Sharon will evacuate Gaza first, they say, and afterwards the outposts, and in the end maybe even the West Bank. And those who most believe that Sharon will dismantle settlements are the parties of the Left. On what basis?

Sharon is known as a man who has not always told the truth. At the time of the Lebanon war, he succeeded in concealing his plan even from the then-Prime Minister, Menachem Begin. He has no problem making promises and then not fulfilling. For three years now he has been promising the US that he will immediately evacuate at least the outposts that were created during his current term as Prime Minister. So what? – He can always propose a new commitment that would postpone the realization of the previous one. Why should the Gaza “Disengagement” be any different? The answer that the Right and the Left agree on is that this time Sharon has changed. That is an interesting answer in the realm of psychology. But what confirmation does it have in the realm of facts? It is much easier at the present to imagine many scenarios in which there will not be any evacuation of settlements in July, than the one in which there will be an evacuation.

Let’s take for example the problem of the evacuees. That is a real problem. The Gaza Strip settlers went there at the behest of the Israeli government. They must be compensated for this dreadful idiocy, to allow them to rebuild their lives. A government that really wanted to evacuate them would have already given them the compensation, so they could leave before the evacuation. In the evacuation of Yamit, in 1982, the overwhelming majority of the residents were compensated and left before the evacuation. Those who were present in the confrontation on the scene were settler activists from the outside, with whom it is easier to deal than with families actually living there. According to Yonatan Bassi, head of the Disengagement Administration, over half of the present Gaza Strip settlers have already expressed their willingness to leave (1). So why doesn’t Sharon facilitate their immediate departure? Could it be that he wants the photographs of the first attempt to evacuate them to show us entire families with their children, whose world has been destroyed, so that we will understand through empathy that it is simply impossible to evacuate?

And why this foot-dragging over the Budget? What the right-wing opponents of the Budget are demanding is a referendum. The mainstream of the settlers camp is not interested in a complete break with Israeli society. Their leaders are saying that they will be ready to accept the decision, but only if it is proven clearly that it is the will of the majority. The Likud rebels of course have their own agenda, which they hitch to this demand. But precisely on

this issue, it is a simple matter to call their bluff by giving them what they demand. According to all the polls, there is a decisive and stable majority of 60%-70% in favour of the evacuation of Gaza. Even in the poll taken a couple of days after the terror attack at the Stage Club in Tel Aviv, 66% said they would have voted "yes" for the plan, had a referendum taken place that day (2). The disengagement will pass in a referendum. That is clear even to the Right. Why then does Sharon oppose it? Perhaps he does not really want the settlers to compromise and accept the will of the majority? Maybe he is afraid that if the evacuation decision passes in the referendum it will have to be actually carried out sooner or later?

All there is, then, is the faith that Sharon has changed. In its name, all the parties of the Left are obediently lined up behind him. Not only the Labour, which would be probably willing to sit in any government, even one headed by "Gandhi"*; but also Yahad and Hadash**. Sharon is submitting for approval a budget of plunder and robbery, that cuts further the surviving remnants of public services, and all the left-wing parties have to say is that we have to help him to pass it, because he said that he will evacuate settlements.

Of the 100,000 people who showed up for the demonstration of the Left parties a year ago, that demanded a pullout from Gaza, 90,000 stayed home in this week's demonstration. Could it be that many of them feel in their heart of hearts that they are being deceived? The Israeli Left chose to commit suicide. It is no longer beholden to its voters. It is beholden only to Sharon.

* "Gandhi" is the peculiar nickname in Israel of Rehavam Ze'evi, a former general and politician who was assassinated in 2001 while serving as Israel's Minister of Tourism. He had a reputation as an extreme nationalist and anti-Arab chauvinist who openly supported transfer. The present Sharon- Labour government decided lately to establish a national memorial day for him, similar to that of Rabin. [M.M]] ** Yahad is a moderate Zionist party headed by Yossi Beilin. It supports a two-state solution. Hadash is the Israeli Communist Party, headed by Muhammad Barakeh. It is a non-Zionist Jewish/Arab party. [M.M]

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