

SHARON'S EXPANSIONISM CONTRAVENES INTERNATIONAL LAW

As he runs frenetically against time, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is giving final touches to his Gaza evacuation plan. Basically, the plan involves giving parts of the Occupied Territories where 7500 Israeli colonists are living illegally – under costly protection of the army - surrounded by 1,300,000 Palestinians. As compensation, the colonists are to be relocated in the West Bank where the present illegal colonies would be simultaneously ratified.

As Britain's Financial Times noted, "the Bush decision to give something between a green and an amber light to this new violation of international law is inflammatory and irresponsible". Yet, despite this dramatic development, it seems many observers today only have little to say about it and instead, prefer to reflect about the American policy in the Middle East over the years, or to engage into vague considerations about the personal future and proper survival of Ariel Sharon and Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat. They dissert about who should lead Israel or Palestine and often conclude that the conflict is beyond resolution if Arafat and Sharon remain in power. Arafat indeed would never make the reforms he promised. The dysfunctional Palestinian political system would have only worsened over the years and the emerging power struggle between inept and corrupt nationalist warlords and the leaders of the young nationalist guard would be soon exploding. On the other side, Sharon would not wish to see a strong and legitimate Palestinian leadership with a coherent strategy to secure a viable Palestinian homeland. "Sharon's intransigence has given Arafat his excuse while the Palestinian's obstinacy has provided the Israeli with his justification", writes Ph. Stephens in the FT. In another development, Dennis Ross, a former representative of the Clinton administration to the Middle East, explains in a recent book "The missing Peace" why Arafat should carry most of the blame. As he is now looking, along with his colleagues, for a possible reprise of their roles in any Kerry administration, the pro-Israel Ross forgets to look at the Palestinian point of view -the suffering caused as a result of the occupation and the doubling of the number of colonists. He doesn't even make any reference to the widening gap between the American Jewish zealots who are behind Bush' Middle East policy and a majority of Americans who oppose building new colonies. As a Ramallah-based researcher wrote, one may hope that any new American administration -if there is one- will look for deeper reasons for their failure in clinching a peace deal after the Camp David advances.

Irrespective of the pertinence of these analysis, which may seem incongruous given the present situation in the Occupied Territories, preparations for an imminent drama goes on full swing. Nobody will be surprised at Sharon's dedication to the Gaza evacuation plan. His plan could leave Israel in control of roughly half the occupied West Bank and therefore 90% of mandate Palestine. The withdrawal from Gaza is of course not a prelude for Sharon to a Palestinian state, as people of good faith might think. It is an apparent and tactical retreat in order to annex larger chunks of Palestinian territories in the West Bank, in pursuit of his ambition for a Greater Israel. Nobody will be surprised either that his fellow Likud members oppose that plan and, recently at a party's convention in Tel Aviv, won a non-binding majority for vetoing a national unity pact with the Labour that could have offered an alternative majority in parliament. Likud extremists always had a very clear and straightforward solution to the Palestinian issue -send them all back to Jordan. But the amazing fact is the support Sharon has enjoyed from the Bush administration. Last April, he already got Bush to endorse his plan's main lines. Last week, he moved one step further when it appeared that Bush would support his decision to construct 1,000 new housing units in the

West Bank. In 2003, the number of housing units in colonies rose by 35% while construction inside Israel contracted by 35%. In 2004, colony construction projects will represent 12% of the total construction work, whereas the colonists will represent 3.6% of the total Israeli population. "We will study the file" said the Bush administration in a first 'threatening' move, until the New York Times disclosed that an agreement had been reached so as "to meet the natural growth of the population". During World War 2nd, the Nazis also extended some detention camps as a result of 'a growth of population'. But the point is that they should have never erected such camps. The 'roadmap' provided for a total freeze on constructions in colonies where 240,000 Israeli live. Bush himself has thus buried the roadmap, but this doesn't stop there. Under international law, all colonies in occupied land are illegal. The 4th Geneva Convention, which Israeli Supreme Court has enjoined the Sharon's government to ratify, specifically forbids the occupiers from "transferring parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies". Sharon's expansionism contravenes international law, which is nothing new. But he undermines moderate opinion of those who still believe in a negotiated solution. He will be held responsible for that, as for the rest.

Meanwhile, hiding behind a usual smoke screen, Sharon and accomplices go on entertaining the world stage with gimmicks of their own. Last week, Israeli minister Sylvan Shalom was in France to ask it to change its laws "in order to better fight anti-Semitism". Actually, he was making a European tour in view of the forthcoming vote on the wall at the UN. "We consider that anti-Semitism and racism lead to terrorism. As we share same democratic values, we should be united in the fight against terrorism, and fight anti-Semitism and racism which feed it", he said. But we do not share the same 'democratic' values of a country which doesn't respect international law, which treats its prisoners in an inhuman way and ultimately, which refuses to acknowledge its own responsibility for terrorism.

Luc Debieuvre, August 30th, 2004