

The Withdrawal From Gaza

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Sharon, the Israeli Prime Minister, decided in a courageous step to withdraw from Gaza strip which has been under occupation since 1967. Israeli leaders have thought over the years that the occupation of Gaza is a costly burden, and the Israeli army should pull out. Even Peres, a former Israeli prime minister, said once that his wish was to get up in the morning and found Gaza swallowed by the sea.

Gaza strip is a small area of 365 km², but it is densely populated with about 1,300,000 people. For the visitor, it seems to be from its north to the south as one city, with very limited spaces that separate the various population centers. Probably that is why it caused so much trouble for the well-equipped and well-trained Israeli army. With the density of population and houses, it is very hard for a regular army to conduct the military maneuvers and tactics needed to quell the armed resistance. The zone is suitable for resistance that depends on primitive tools and methods, but extremely obstructive for tanks and armored vehicles.

The Palestinian factions have shown since the early seventies determination to fight the Israelis, and at certain times the Israeli army seemed to be in control during the daylight, and the resistance during the night. The Israelis needed so many troops to tighten their grip. This situation deteriorated with the erection of Israeli settlements which are a prime target for the Palestinians. Israel needed more troops to protect the settlers and guard them in all of their movements.

The Israelis have adopted so many measures so as to break the will of the Palestinians: killings, arrests, land confiscation, house demolition, uprooting trees, maiming of people and collective punishments. The Palestinians have been immensely suffering from these measures but remained steadfast and unwilling to surrender.

In his elections campaign that led him to the office of the premier, Sharon promised to build settlements everywhere in the West bank and Gaza. This is part of his ideology that considers the occupied territory of 1967 a part of the land of Israel, or what is called greater Israel. That is why he could make a political coalition of right wing parties who share him the same views. Concerning the uprising (intifada), he promised to squeeze it down within one hundred days. But he was disappointed and found it impossible to end the intifada regardless of the harshness of his repressive measures.

Sharon found himself cornered and has to choose: either stand to his ideological beliefs or bow to political reality on the ground. The Palestinian resistance escalated and he had to build a wall in the West Bank contrary to his previous political statements. He thought that he would be able to achieve security through the west bank wall and the withdrawal from Gaza. His decision concerning the withdrawal from Gaza caused an uproar in his coalition and culminated in a split. Due to the absence of a majority in the parliament, he decided to seek the support of his rivals in the labor party. He could do that because the labor party is in support of the withdrawal.

The unthinkable on the Palestinian arena happened. The Palestinian Authority protested the withdrawal and called upon Israel to allow for coordination. The authority thought that the withdrawal appears to be a victory for the resistance, while it wanted it to appear as part of its achievements through the negotiating table. If Israel makes the coordination with the Authority, it will gain impetus toward dismantling the Palestinian fighting

organizations and bring them to the corner of obedience. Israel is willing to have a Palestinian partner but under the condition of observing Israeli security. The Authority is required to disarm the resistance, prevent the far distance rocketing of Israeli targets and to imprison those Palestinians who continue to resist.

For the Palestinian factions, they say that their efforts have liberated Gaza, and they will continue the struggle until the liberation of the West bank and the restoration of the Palestinian rights. Consequently, they say that the Authority shouldn't strangle itself and the Palestinians with the Israeli demands, and believe that the administration of Gaza should be arranged internally without the interference of external elements.

Due to these differences, and to American and Israeli pressure, the Authority opened fire on Hamas commandos who launched rockets on Israel. Limited fighting erupted. But if the Authority insists on coordination with the Israelis, more internal Palestinian fighting, but not civil war, is expected.